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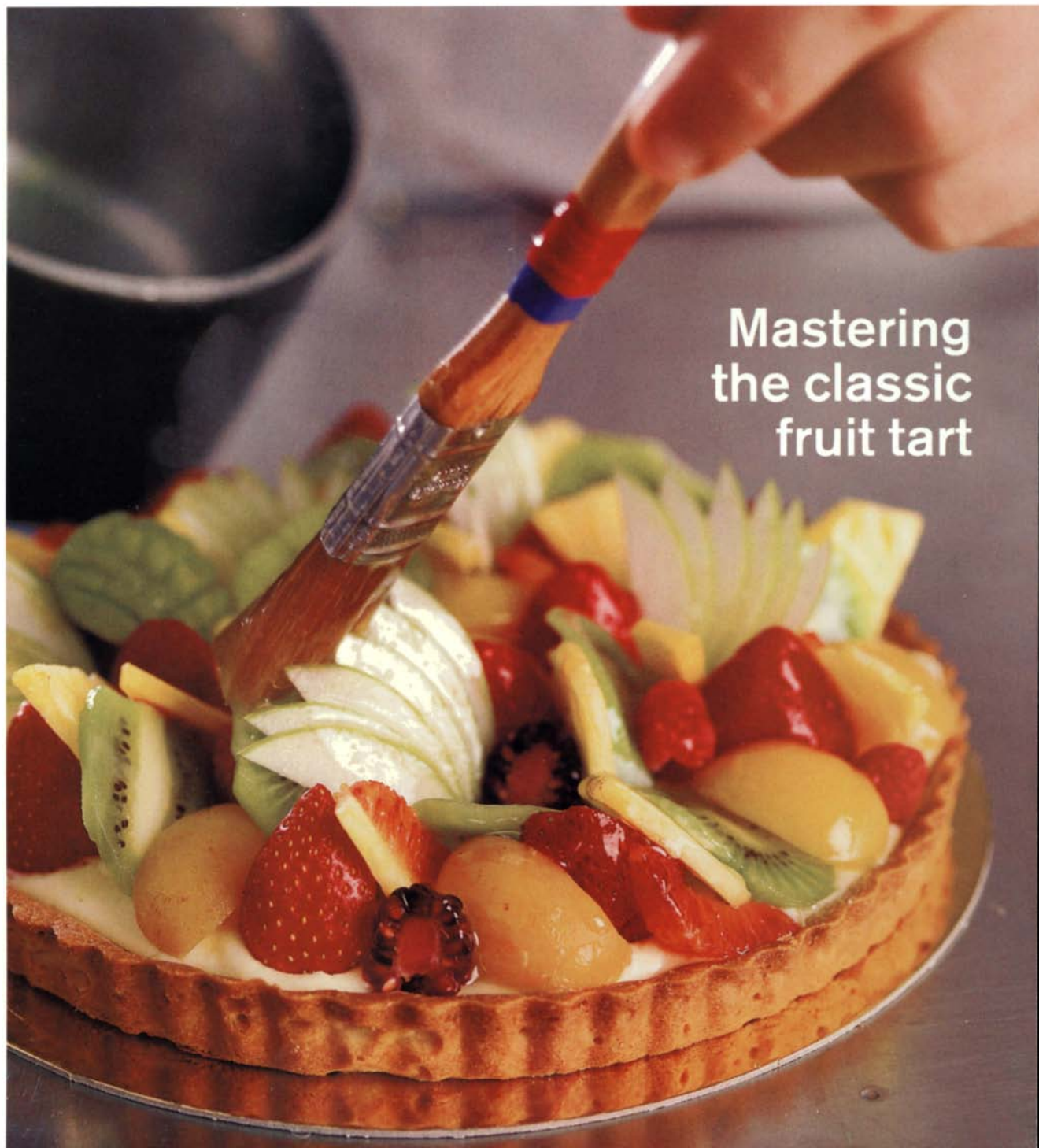
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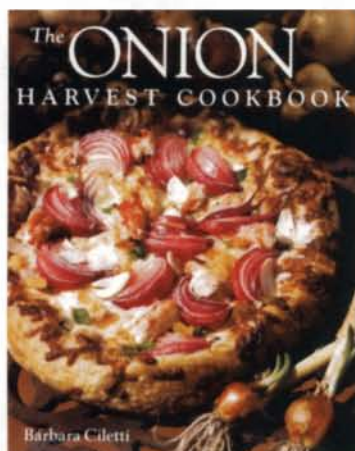
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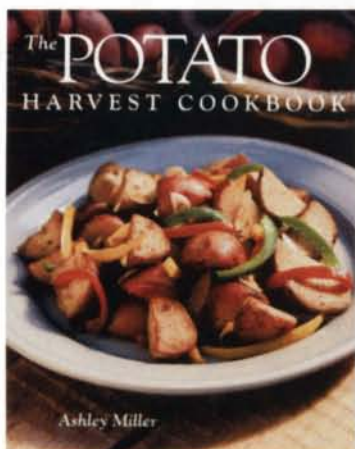
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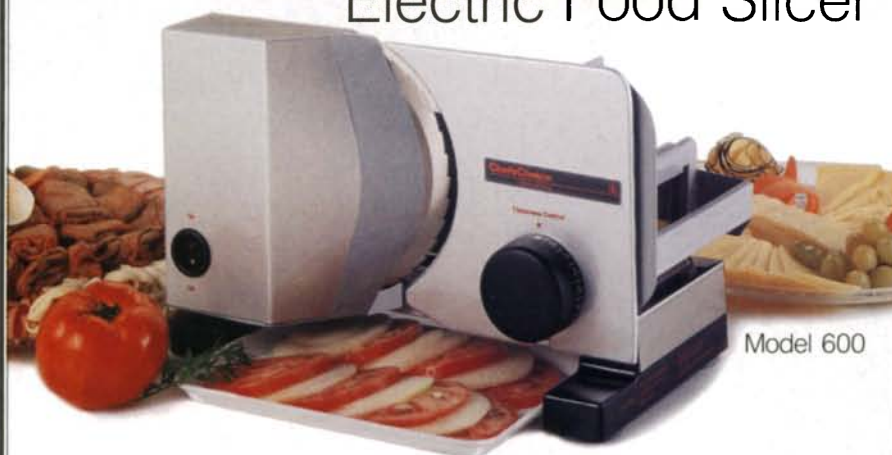
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C^{fine} COOKING[®]

JUNE/JULY 1999 ISSUE 33



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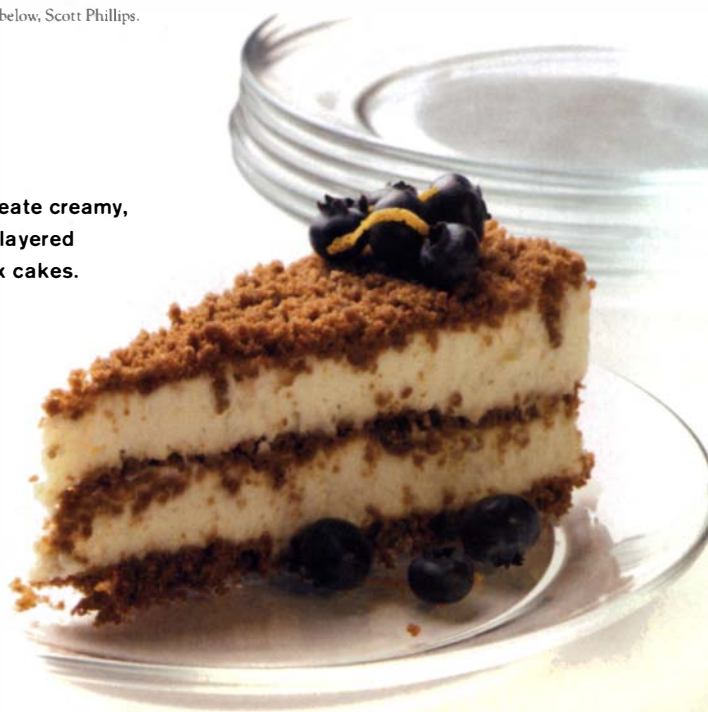
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On the cover: *Fresh Fruit Tart*, p. 67.

Cover photo, Ben Fink. These pages: top left series, Mark Ferri; center, Scott Phillips; bottom left, Amy Albert; below, Scott Phillips.

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Molly Stevens

("Spice Rubs," p. 62), a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*, travels far and wide to teach, eat, and gather ideas. Molly earned a Grand Diplôme from La Varenne cooking school in Paris, staying on in France to work as a chef and caterer. Back on these shores, Molly worked

at the French Culinary Institute in New York and at the New England Culinary Institute as a chef-instructor. She now often returns to Europe to orchestrate cooking classes for La Varenne's founder, Anne Willan. Back home in Vermont, she's working on a book on the cooking of New England.

Susie Middleton ("Summer Vegetable Gratin," p. 24) is a blue-ribbon graduate of Peter Kump's New York Cooking School. After several years working as a chef for a gourmet market in Newport, Rhode Island, and writing food articles for the *Providence Journal*, Susie joined the staff of *Fine Cooking* as an associate editor in 1996.



Steve Johnson

has often fantasized about opening what he calls a "house of beef," a small, singular restaurant where he could indulge his passion for steaks

seven nights a week, but for the moment, his article ("Perfectly Grilled Steaks," p. 30) will have to suffice. A French major who got turned on to cooking while living in Montpellier, France, in the late 1970s, Steve was a sous-chef at Hamersley's Bistro in Boston before becoming the chef and co-owner of the very popular Blue Room in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Su-Mei Yu ("Thai Salads," p. 35) is the owner of Saffron restaurant in San Diego, California. Born to Chinese parents who emigrated to Thailand before she was born, Su-Mei is passionate about recreating the aromas and flavors she remembers from growing up in Bangkok. She's at work on a



book on traditional Thai cooking, due out from William Morrow next summer. Su-Mei lives in La Jolla, California.

Aliza Green

("Guide to Fresh Herbs," p. 40) has spent most of her life cooking, travelling, and reading and writing about food. At 27, Aliza became a four-star chef at Ristorante DiLullo in Philadelphia, where she spent six years perfecting its Northern Italian menu, studying Italian, and frequently travelling to Italy in search of authenticity. In 1988, she founded her own food consulting company. Aliza's cookbook and guide to legumes is scheduled to be published by Running Press next spring.

Norberto Jorge's

first cooking teachers were his mother and grandmother, who instilled in him a respect and love for the traditional food of his native Levante, the southeast coastal region where Spain's fantastic rice dishes originate ("Paella," p. 46). In the last 25 years, Norberto has opened and owned numerous restaurants in Spain and in Norway (his wife is Norwegian), among them the highly regarded Casa Benigna in Madrid.



A graduate of Boston University and the Culinary Institute of America, **Heather Ho** ("Icebox Cakes," p. 52) has worked as a pastry cook at many great restaurants, including Bouley and Gramercy Tavern in

New York City. Before following her heart to San Francisco, she opened two New York restaurants as pastry chef: The Screening Room, for which she created her lemon-caramel icebox cake, and Clementine, where that same cake was among the pastries that garnered much praise. She's now creating delicious desserts for Boulevard restaurant in San Francisco.

Maggie Glezer

("Rolling Pins," p. 55), who writes about baking in Atlanta, owns several rolling pins but keeps her great-grandmother Kate's tapered French pin especially close at hand. Maggie has just written a book about artisan bread-baking in America, due out soon from Artisan Books.

For the past four years, **Joanne**

McAllister Smart has been helping people become better cooks as part of the editing team at *Fine Cooking*. She collected the most important advice she's heard and presented it in "How to Improve Your Cooking" (p. 58).



François Payard

("Perfect Fruit Tarts," p. 67) is a third-generation pastry chef who developed his passion for pastry in his family's shop on the Riviera,

Au Nid des Friandises. He traded the south of France for Paris, to work in some of the city's finest restaurants, including La Tour d'Argent and Lucas Carton. In 1990, he moved to New York, earning accolades at Le Bernadin and Restaurant Daniel. In 1997, François opened his own place on New York's Upper East Side, Payard Pâtisserie & Bistro. **Joanne Chang** left a career in management consulting to follow her passion for pastry. After four years in some of Boston's best restaurants, including Rialto, she moved to New York, where she practiced her French pastry by working for François Payard. She has recently returned to Boston, where she's the pastry chef at Mistral. She plans to open her own shop soon, specializing in artisan breads, elegant cakes, pastries, and cookies.

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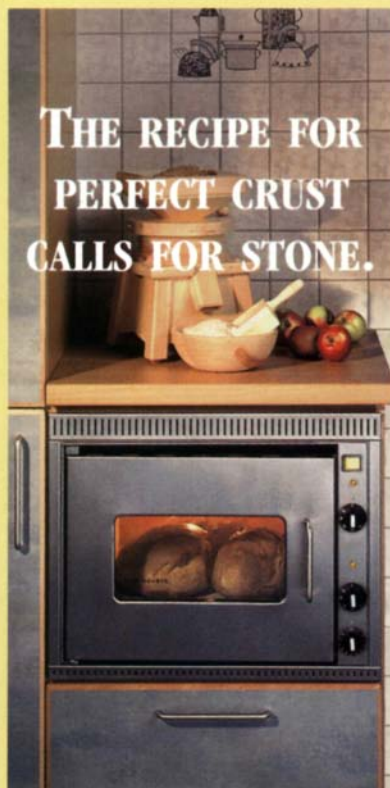
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Here's the place to share your thoughts on our recent articles or your food and cooking philosophies. Send your comments to Letters, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, or by e-mail to fc@taunton.com.

The ice cream's so good, I don't mind the noise

After reading Sarah Jay's article on ice cream machines in *Fine Cooking* #31 (p. 50), I had to write.

I own an electric White Mountain ice-cream machine, which Sarah calls "loud and somewhat messy" in her article. To limit mess, I set the wooden bucket in a large plastic tub on the floor to catch the run-off as the ice melts.

When the ice cream is done, I remove the metal canister containing the ice cream and I leave the wooden bucket, with the ice, in the plastic tub until the ice melts. Then I scoop out the rock salt and set it in an open container to finish drying before putting a lid on it to save it for the next time. To rinse the wooden tub of salt particles (which can shorten its life), I rinse it out with a garden hose or the bathroom tub faucet. As for the noise, once the machine's turned on, my work

is done, and I go in another room to relax and listen for the sound that says it's done. And as for the ice cream it makes, I've never been disappointed.

—Renee Tate,
via e-mail

Sear-roasting to the rescue

Bravo to Isabelle Alexandre! Her sear-roasting technique (*Fine Cooking* #31, p. 28) looked so appealing that my husband and I tried it with a strip steak, and the result was

so good that we made the chicken and salmon as well. Outstanding! All three are now in our culinary repertoire.

And since the inside of the food turns out so juicy, I decided to try the technique on ground beef which, in this time of *E. coli* fears, we are cautioned to cook well-done, causing us to stop preparing it altogether. But rather than drying out, the lean (15% fat) ground round cooked to delicious perfection in three minutes stovetop and three more in the superhot oven. An old favorite is back on our list again, thanks to *Fine Cooking*.

—Anne Lindsay,
Chesterland, OH

What's "ethnic" for some is simply unavailable for others

You asked for readers' comments on ethnic cuisine (*Fine Cooking* #31, p. 8); here are a few of mine: I believe "ethnic cuisine" is a relative term. Soy sauce in Bloomington, Indiana, is ethnic. Italian groceries do not exist. Italian sausage cannot be found, although I know of one small grocery that carries Middle Eastern foods and some European and Asian ingredients. Broccoli raab is unheard of, even though it has been featured in cooking magazines and cookbooks for several years. Arugula is sold in our only chain supermarket in tiny plastic envelopes as an herb for \$2 for about five small leaves. Lemongrass? Huh? I'm skeptical of mail-order because of high shipping costs, and as I have limited room, I don't want to have to buy large quantities to make it worthwhile.

Over the years, I've looked at many cookbooks but have

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had to pick and choose carefully because ingredients are just not available.

So many cookbook authors and food writers don't seem to realize that what's available on the East and West coasts is just not available between the Hudson River and the Sierra Nevadas. Thanks for listening.

—*Esther Whitby, via e-mail*

More thoughts on ethnic cuisines

I want to support Laura Casa's request for additional recipes from Afghanistan. I dug out my copy of *Fine Cooking* #6 in December and prepared the eggplant with garlic yogurt as part of our Christmas dinner. I am not particularly interested in recipes from cookbooks, which can be purchased, but would very much appreciate your regularly featuring recipes that can't be found in books, especially emphasizing countries such as Afghanistan, for which there are not currently any English cookbooks in print. If you aren't planning another issue featuring Afghan food, perhaps you could assist your readers by including a place for people to provide recipes from Afghanistan on your web site.

—*Carollee Peterson, via e-mail*

Editors' reply: Afghan cooking isn't on the slate for the

next year, at least, but anyone who has any Afghan recipes to exchange (we've had a specific request for Aushak) should go onto our Cooks Talk forum, where readers can discuss cooking and food topics and exchange recipes. To get to Cooks Talk, just go to our web site, www.finecooking.com, and click on Discussion.

They're mad at us in Louisiana

How could James Peterson (and you) fail to mention the Pope and the Holy Trinity of Cajun cooking in your article on *mirepoix* ("The First Step to Great Flavor," *Fine Cooking* #31, p. 38)?

—*Joel Wiessler, via e-mail*

Editors' reply: In James Peterson's article, we printed a chart of "flavor bases." Unfortunately, we didn't have room to include *all* the flavor bases from around the world. We confess that we did omit an important American regional flavoring: the onions, celery, and green pepper used in Cajun cooking, fondly referred to as "the Holy Trinity." Cajuns are crazy for garlic, too, which they sometimes call "the Pope."

For crunchy pickles, don't forget the grape leaves

In *Fine Cooking* #31, there's a Q&A on preserving the

crunch in pickles (p. 11). One thing that Linda Ziedrich forgot to mention is to add fresh grape leaves to the jar. Alice Waters, in her book *Chez Panisse Vegetables*, states that fresh grape leaves contain alum, which helps to make the pickles crisp (p. 129). Thought this information might help. Thanks for a great magazine.

—*Ray Morin, Boston, MA*

Fine Cooking event sold out

We're both pleased and sorry to say that our California Experience food and wine event has sold out. The event, which will be held October 21–24, 1999, combines artisan food tours with garden visits, wine tastings, and two specially designed classes at CIA Greystone. We'll include a full report on the event in an upcoming issue.

Getting the most from *Fine Cooking's* recipes

When you cook from a *Fine Cooking* recipe, we want you to get as good a result as we did in our test kitchen, so we recommend that you follow the guidelines below in addition to the recipe instructions.

Before you start to cook, read the recipe completely. Gather the ingredients and prepare them as directed in the recipe list before proceeding to the method. Give your oven plenty of time to heat to the temperature in the recipe; use an oven thermometer to check.

Always start checking for doneness a few minutes before the suggested time in the recipe. For meat and poultry, use an instant-read thermometer.

In baking recipes especially, the amounts of some ingredients (flour, butter, nuts, etc.) are listed by weight (pounds, ounces) and by volume (cups, tablespoons). Professional bakers measure by weight for consistent results, but we list volume measures too because not many home cooks have scales (although we highly recommend them—see *Fine Cooking* #13, p. 68, and #17, p. 62).

To measure flour by volume, stir the flour and then lightly spoon it into a dry measure and level it with a knife; don't shake or tap the cup. Measure liquids in glass or plastic liquid measuring cups.

Unless otherwise noted, assume that

- ◆ Butter is unsalted.
- ◆ Eggs are large (about 2 ounces each).
- ◆ Flour is all-purpose (don't sift unless directed to).
- ◆ Sugar is granulated.
- ◆ Garlic, onions, and fresh ginger are peeled.
- ◆ Fresh herbs, greens, and lettuces are washed and dried.

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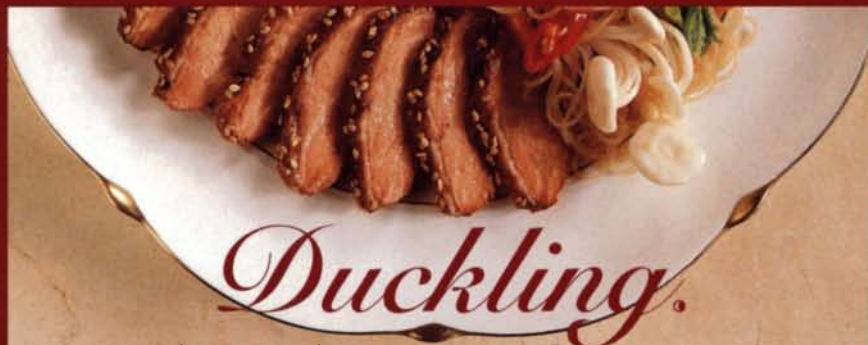
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Have a question of general interest about cooking?

Write to Q&A, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, and we'll find a cooking professional with the answer.

Where to hang a pot rack

What's the best location and height for installing a pot rack?

—Dick Carpenter, via e-mail

Jan Weimer replies: A hanging pot rack—whether a simple metal wall bar or an elaborate one that hangs from the ceiling like a chandelier—is a practical way of relieving cabinet congestion, using otherwise wasted space, and housing cooking tools within reach of where they'll be used.



If you're hanging pots, pans, and stovetop cooking utensils, choose a location that's near your range, though preferably not directly above the cooktop because the hanging items would get greasy. If you plan to hang items like colanders, bowls, strainers, whisks, and graters, the rack could be useful over a prep area. In both cases, it should be mounted away from busy thoroughfares so no one bumps a head.

The best height for the rack depends on your height. It should be low enough so you can easily move a pan on or off by merely extending an arm but high enough so the rack and pans aren't an obstruc-

tion. When determining this ideal height, consider the sizes of the objects you plan to hang.

If you're installing the rack yourself, be sure the fasteners are strong enough to support the weight of the rack and its contents and long enough to sufficiently penetrate the framing, whether wall studs or ceiling joists. The toughest and most important part is finding the framing behind the plaster or drywall. If you're worried about the weight of all those heavy pots, or if you're more comfortable handling an electric mixer than an electric drill, ask a professional for help.

Jan Weimer, a kitchen consultant in Los Angeles, wrote Kitchen Redos, Revamps, Remodels & Replacements without Murder, Suicide, or Divorce (William Morrow).

Pointers for high-altitude baking

Now that I live at 6,000 feet above sea level, my doughs tend to rise too high and my cakes undercook inside. Any suggestions?

—Katy Reardon, via e-mail

Letty Platt replies: Baked goods turn out differently at high altitudes because of the lower atmospheric pressure. With less air pressure, bread doughs and cake batters rise too much or too quickly and their cell structures stretch or break, creating a coarse texture, or causing the bread or cake to fall. Also, liquids evaporate faster at higher altitudes due to the lower boiling temperature of water. Rapid evaporation makes other ingredients, such as sugar and fat, more concentrated than

they are at sea level. This can also damage the cell structure, causing doughs to collapse, among other problems.

A lot of high-altitude cooking involves trial and error, with the baker having to make adjustments based on experience and the recipe's ingredients (recipes may need adjustment starting at 3,000 feet above sea level). I can't tell you exactly how to adapt every recipe, but here are some starting points.

♦ **For yeast breads**, the rising dough will double sooner, and oven spring, which is the immediate rising of the dough in the hot oven, will be more pronounced. To allow for extra oven spring, put the shaped, risen loaves in the oven just *before* they double in size. You can also try to compensate for the faster rise by reducing the yeast by about 20 percent.

♦ **For cakes and quick breads**, decrease the sugar by one to two tablespoons per cup of sugar (to recalibrate the sugar concentration). Undercooked batters may be the result of the concentrated sugar insulating the egg protein, thereby raising the temperature at which the eggs (and consequently the batter) can set. Reducing the sugar will minimize its insulating effect, whereas raising the oven temperature would likely just scorch the edges. If the recipe includes egg whites, whip them until they form soft peaks that just fold over—don't whip until stiff. This leaves enough elasticity in the whites for air bubbles to expand without bursting.

You can also try reducing the baking powder or baking soda by 15% to as much as 60%, depending on your alti-

tude. When the leavening ratios are correct, the dough or batter will rise to perfect height, and not collapse, by the time the oven heat sets the expanding gas cells.

As executive pastry chef at Deer Valley Resort in Park City, Utah, Letty Flatt bakes daily above 7,000 feet. Her forthcoming book, Chocolate Snowball & Other Fabulous Pastries from Deer Valley's Bakery (Falcon), includes a chapter on the science of high-altitude baking.

Vinegar that has a mother

An herbal vinegar that I brought back from France now has a brownish layer at the top. Has it developed a mother, and is the vinegar still safe?

—Leif Ostberg, via e-mail

Michele Anna Jordan replies: I can't be certain without seeing it, but it sounds like your vinegar has conjured up a mother, a gelatinous mat of acetobacter and cellulose. Acetobacter is the bacteria responsible for digesting alcohol and producing acetic acid, which gives vinegar its sour taste. Generally, only unpasteurized vinegars form mothers, but I have seen commercially pasteurized ones do so. Red vinegars produce deep, wine-colored mothers, while white vinegars make grayish ones; herbs or spices will also affect the color. Acetobacters need oxygen to



survive, so if the mother has sunk to the bottom of the jar, it's dead and will eventually impart a decaying flavor to the vinegar.


As long as the vinegar's acidity is 5% or higher (check the label), no harmful bacteria can grow. So if the vinegar smells all right and still tastes good after removing the mother, it's fine to use.

It's possible to save the mother and use it to start another batch of vinegar, but I don't advise it. You have more control if you use a good-quality unpasteurized vinegar, rather than a

mother, as the source of acetobacter for homemade vinegar. And though I've heard many stories saying otherwise, I've never been able to document the belief that the mother of one great vinegar will give rise to another one.

To remove the mother, strain the vinegar through a paper coffee filter (don't use a metal sieve or you might end up with more unpleasant flavors) and store the vinegar in a clean container. It keeps best in a cool cupboard. Even so, if you keep the vinegar for too much longer, another mother may begin to form, so if you like the vinegar, use it quickly. Michele Anna Jordan wrote *The Good Cook's Book of Oil & Vinegar* (Addison-Wesley). ♦

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New KitchenAid pans are strong, svelte performers

"Thrilling" isn't a word I'd normally use to describe pots and pans, but after cooking with KitchenAid's new line of cookware, the term does come to mind. I had a feeling I'd like this cookware as soon as I grabbed the saucepan's smooth, broad handle and felt the pot's impressive weight.

The handles, sleekly curved and snugly riveted, are cast stainless steel, which means they'll stay relatively cool while the pan gets quite hot.

I put a saucepan and a sauté pan through their paces and found that they're not only comfortable to work with, they're also responsive. Perfectly seared shrimp, smooth reduction sauces, puffy frittatas, and slow-braised vegetables are a cinch to make in these heavy-duty, ovenproof pans that quickly respond to the heat source. Cleanup is easy, too—even cooked-on oatmeal comes off easily.



This new cookware comes in two lines: The five-ply stainless-steel-clad line has three layers of permanently bonded aluminum sandwiched between stainless steel, with the aluminum core extending across the bottom and up the sides for the best possible heat distribution. The high-density hard-anodized line boasts an outer layer of hard-anodized aluminum, which is dark gray and shiny (rather than the traditional matte you've seen on other anodized pans). The anodized pan's high-gloss nonporous exterior is easy to keep clean and just about impossible to scratch. And the cookware comes with heavy, snug-fitting, stainless lids.

Both lines are available in individual pieces (\$85 to \$270) and as seven- and nine-piece sets (\$400 to \$650).

These are built to be **the last pans you'll ever buy.**

For retail information, call 888/801-1707.

—Amy Albert, associate editor, Fine Cooking



Cyberkitchen: Catalogs online

Two of our favorite kitchen catalogs are now on the Web. Check out www.cookswares.com for more than 25 lines of pots and pans—and an incredible selection of utensils, appliances, bakeware, and knives—at excellent prices. Then take a look at www.chefscatalog.com for free shipping and heavy discounts on a huge selection of items for the kitchen.

The "chipper" is an easier way to chop chocolate

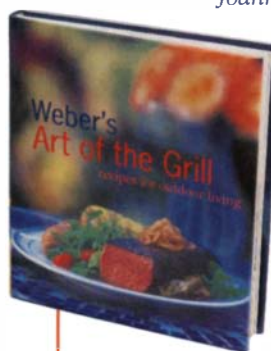


As a professional pastry chef, I'll do anything to make the chore of chopping chocolate easier. Sometimes I hold a wrapped slab of chocolate above my head and send it crashing to the floor to shatter it into tiny pieces

(I'm sure to shout out, "Dropping chocolate!"

first). But now I've got a tool that lets me reduce large chocolate slabs into small, manageable pieces without all that racket. This "chocolate chipper" resembles a multi-pronged ice pick, and it cuts through big chunks of chocolate with minimum muscle. Just poke the chipper into a block of chocolate, grab the handle with both hands, and press down, using your body weight. The prongs effortlessly pierce the chocolate and reduce it to easy-to-use pieces. The chocolate chipper, made of nickel-plated steel with a wooden handle, is available from La Cuisine for \$18. Call 800/521-1176.

—Joanne Chang, pastry chef, *Mistral*, Boston



Get grilling with Weber's new cookbook

With newsletters, videos, and a web site (weberbbq.com), Weber Grill has always given cooks helpful ways to get grilling.

Now the company has produced *Weber's Art of the Grill*, a cookbook with recipes from chef Jamie Purviance. I like the colorful format, easy-to-read recipes, and Tim Turner's beautiful photos, and I can't wait to try recipes like Hoisin-Glazed Baby Back Ribs and Rosemary & Garlic Veal Chops. I only wish there were more of the helpful tips and techniques that Weber is known for. There's a handy grilling guide with recommended cooking times, but not enough discussion of the subtleties of direct and indirect cooking.

But this is a small complaint. Sophisticated grillers will be happy to find instructions for grilling everything from lobster tail to paella. Casual grillers will find a selection of steak and chicken recipes, and everyone will like Purviance's simple sauces. The 208-page book is \$35, available in bookstores or through the publisher's web site, chroniclebooks.com.

—Susie Middleton, associate editor, Fine Cooking



Recipe shield holds cookbooks open, too

Here's a simple concept that functions in a big way: a rectangle of clear, flexible plastic, weighed down by marbles, protects cookbooks from splatters and keeps them open at the same time. The shield is 11x21 inches, and the rows of marbles at either end are heavy enough to keep open even the stubbornest cookbooks. The shield rolls up for storage. It's made by the Norpro company; look for it in kitchen shops for around \$10. We found ours at La Cuisine in Alexandria, Virginia (800/521-1176); the Baker's Catalogue (800/827-6836) carries it, too. —S. M.

Le Creuset's Poterie stoneware is microwave- and oven-safe

If you're a fan of Le Creuset cookware but you sometimes wish for bakeware that's more versatile, less expensive, and a bit lighter than enameled cast iron, you'll like the company's new stoneware line. The dishes in the Poterie collection can go from freezer to oven (or microwave) without cracking. The stoneware is non-porous, so it doesn't absorb moisture or odors, and it cooks very evenly.

Poterie comes in bright colors reminiscent of Le Creuset's enameled pots (including the classic "flame") and is available in a range of sizes. The small, shallow $\frac{3}{4}$ - and $1\frac{1}{4}$ -quart dishes are perfect serving sizes for one or two; the bigger

pieces (round, oval, square, and rectangular) are great for casseroles, gratins, baked pastas, baked desserts, or any other recipe you like to cook and serve in the same dish. Affordably priced (\$16.50 to \$49), they're available in specialty kitchen stores and through the Chef's Catalog (800/338-3232). —S. M.



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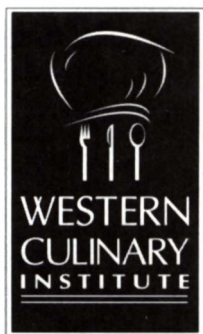
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For Gentle Cooking, Think Steam

Every method of cooking directs heat at foods in a particular way. Poaching uses an abundance of simmering liquid, while roasting uses the hot air and radiant heat of an oven or hearth. Steaming cooks food with hot vapor; the food has no contact with the boiling liquid in the bottom of the steamer pot. The liquid, usually water but occasionally wine or vegetable stock, is brought to a rapid boil. The food is then suspended above the liquid, which is kept at a lively simmer, and the pot covered.

Steaming is especially useful for cooking vegetables because the vegetable's nutrients aren't leached out into the surrounding liquid, which can happen when vegetables are boiled or poached.

And because it's so gentle, steaming protects fragile vegetables, such as tiny new potatoes, that might otherwise be damaged by the movement of the water. For the same reason, steaming is also an excellent method for cooking fish and shellfish; it won't cause these fragile foods to break apart.

A technique where little can go wrong. About the only thing you have to watch for when steaming is that the liquid in the bottom of the steamer doesn't completely evaporate and scorch the bottom of the pan. In most cases, you can avoid this simply by using plenty of liquid.

Types of steamers

My favorite gadget for steaming fish and vegetables is a



Steaming keeps flavors pure and nutrients intact.

couscoussière (designed, as the name implies, for steaming couscous). It looks like a large double boiler with holes punched in the bottom of the upper pot. A large one will accommodate a lot of vegetables and even a whole fish. But you don't need to run out and buy a *couscoussière* because, even though steaming is a simple method, there are myriad steamers and steam-related gadgets from which to choose.

Aluminum steamer sets are long-lasting and versatile.

These consist of a stockpot to hold the water and one or two perforated metal steaming tiers with handles that sit in the top of the pot. Look for a set that fits together well with a deep lip around the rim so the lid fits snugly. The lid should be domed so the steam that condenses on its underside slides down the curve of the lid rather than drips straight down onto the food.

There's just one way to steam but many kinds of steamers



A metal steamer is roomy and durable. Like bamboo steamers (opposite), some models come with two stackable trays that can accommodate even more volume.



A folding steamer basket is good for small amounts of food. Just unfold the steamer inside a pot so the ends of the leaves meet the sides of the pot.



Improvise a steamer. Set opened, emptied, and cleaned cans in the bottom of the pot, add water, set a cake rack on top, and the food on the rack. (We've set it on the counter so you can see it better.)

Collapsible metal steamers work fine for small batches of food. Folding steamers, the kind with perforated metal leaves, are an inexpensive and compact steaming option. These steamers work perfectly well with leafy vegetables or with small amounts of green or root vegetables, but they're awkward to use for seafood because the post in the middle usually gets in the way (although some models come with a removable center post). The basket's short legs also mean you can't put much water in the pot.

Bamboo steamers are traditional and attractive. Chinese steamers, which look vaguely like drums, have bamboo slats held in a thick ring with a snug-fitting lid. One advantage of a bamboo steamer is that you can stack one on top of the other and steam a

relatively large amount of food. You can also easily steam foods with different cooking times by simply adding or removing a layer as the food is cooked, placing the foods that take longest closest to the water. These steamers are also attractive enough to bring to the table as serving pieces.

Chinese steamers are designed to be used in a wok, with the wok's sloping sides holding the steamer above an inch or so of water. But resting the steamer over a pot (as shown below) works well, and you can fill a pot with more water than a wok will hold.

Build your own steamer. If you only steam food once in a while, or if you don't want another gadget cluttering up the kitchen, you can improvise a simple and very efficient steamer with a couple of small, clean, empty cans (tops and bottoms removed), a

round cake rack or a pie plate, and a big pot. A footed, metal colander that fits inside a lidded pot is another option.

Add flavor as you steam

One of the biggest advantages of steaming—that it keeps the flavor of the food pure—is also its greatest disadvantage. Steamed foods can seem bland. But there are tricks to making steamed food—especially fish, shellfish, and vegetables—more flavorful.

Flavorful aromatics, such as ginger, garlic, chiles, scallion, lemongrass, and herbs, can be steamed along with fish or vegetables. (Just be sure to cook the foods in a shallow dish or a pie plate, or the flavorings will fall into the simmering water below.) Marinating the food is another way to add flavor and will give you an instant sauce.

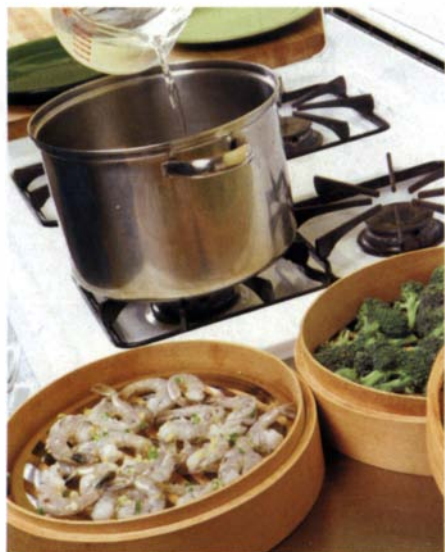
You can also try flavoring the steaming liquid with herbs, spices, or vegetables, so that the steam subtly scents the fish or vegetables; however, I find this effect so subtle as to be barely perceptible.

Steam seems gentle, but it can hurt

Because steam treats food so gently, it's easy to forget how hot it is. When lifting the steamer lid, tilt the lid away from you so the steam shoots out the other side instead of up on your hands and face. Wait a few seconds for the steam to dissipate before looking into the pot. And use oven mitts or towels when retrieving a hot dish or plate from a steamer.

James Peterson, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, is the author of Vegetables (William Morrow). ♦

Using a bamboo steamer is as easy as boiling water



Begin by heating some water. You want enough so it won't boil away but not so much that it takes forever to heat. In the foreground, two bamboo tiers await stacking.



Lift the lid away from you—steam can burn. It can also overcook food, so check for doneness periodically.



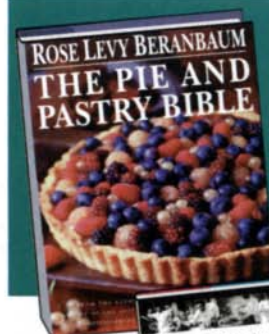
Steaming shrimp helps keep it tender and intact. A sprinkling of ginger, garlic, scallions, and soy sauce adds flavor.

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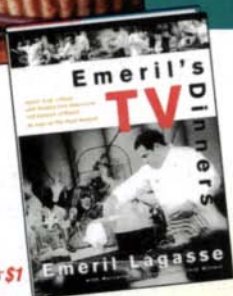


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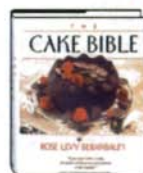
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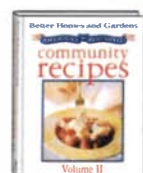
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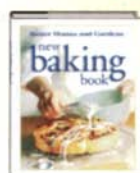
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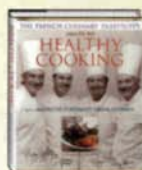
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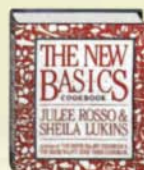
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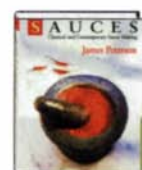
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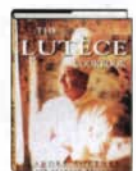
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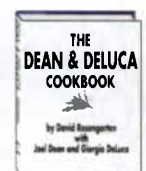
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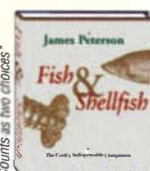
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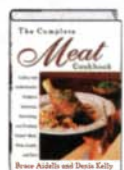
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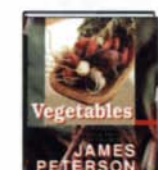
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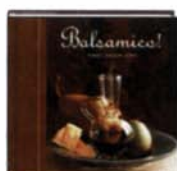
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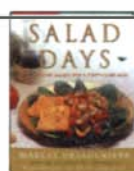
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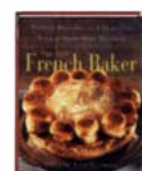
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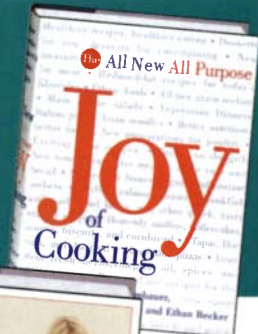
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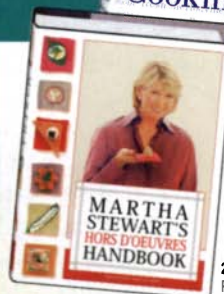
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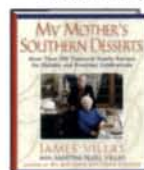
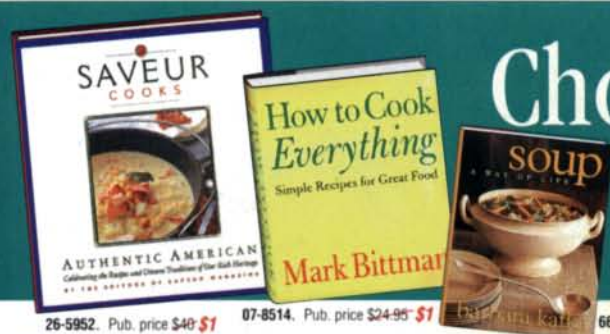


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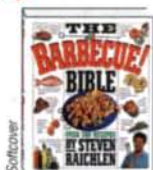


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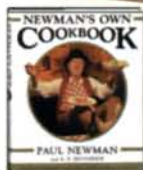
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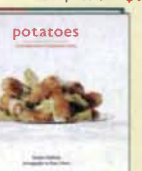
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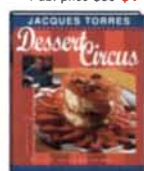
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Green Beans and Shell Beans Add Snap to Summer Meals

Beans—both string and shell—give substance and texture to summer dishes. Blanched string beans tossed with sliced onions and tomatoes or with pasta and pesto make colorful, tasty starters. Fresh shell beans make a light, satisfying main dish, tossed with cherry tomatoes, shallots, chopped basil, and a lemon vinaigrette, or with parsley, garlic, and olive oil, served over hot fettuccine. And both string and shell beans are essential for a true Provençal

soupe au pistou, simmered along with other summer vegetables and served with a spoonful of pesto in each bowl.

Different varieties from the same species

Both string beans and shell beans come from the same plant species (*Phaseolus vulgaris*) but from different varieties within that species. String beans are whole, immature pods, while shell beans



Strike is a particularly tasty long, round string bean similar to the beans we used to find in cans, called **Blue Lake**.

Purple beans are delicious, but their fetching color, which makes them easy to spot on the vine, turns to dark green when cooked. Use them the same way you would yellow and plain green beans.



Yellow snap beans are becoming more widely available. They should be clear yellow with a hint of green at the tips; over-ripe ones will have a washed-out ivory color. Yellow beans are perfect for pickling, as they'll retain their hue in vinegar. They're also pretty when mixed with plain green beans.



Jade beans

are among the modern varieties of string beans that don't have a string. They can be served whole or cut up for salads and soups.



Romano

beans and other flat, wide string beans are especially good in soups, where long cooking coaxes out their characteristic flavor.



Haricots verts

are tiny, tender string beans worth seeking out. Small enough to use without snapping in half, they give a sophisticated look to salads and pasta, and they're beautiful on a main-course plate.



Kentucky Wonder

is an heirloom variety with a rich flavor. Eat it as a string bean when very young or shelled when mature.

Heirloom bean varieties will reward you with superior flavor as well as a sense of history.



are the seeds inside more mature pods. Any string bean variety will produce seeds that can be shelled, but the pods of most shell bean varieties are too tough to be eaten.

You'll find good string beans from early summer until frost. The peak season for shell beans is midsummer into fall; however, fava beans grown during late spring and early summer have the best flavor.

String beans— with or without strings

String beans are also known as snap beans or green beans, even though they can also be yellow or purple.

String beans are best when they feel heavy and plump. They should break with a good, clean snap when bent. Store them in a plastic bag in the refrigerator for no more than a couple of days.

To prepare string beans, first check for the string. Most modern varieties don't have much of a string, as it has been bred out. To check, snap off the stem end. If you find just a small string attached, don't bother pulling it; just go ahead and work in bunches, cutting off the tops and tails. If the string is long and tough, work individually, snapping off both ends of each bean and pulling the string down from top to tail. Some cooks like the look of the tails left on, but I find that

they're tough and unpleasant, and I prefer to cut or snap off both ends.

To cook string beans, boil them in a large pot of salty water until crisp-tender. I learned that it was best to stop the cooking by plunging the beans into an ice-water bath, but now I prefer to undercook them slightly, drain them, lay them out on a towel, and refrigerate them. This method preserves lots more flavor. If you're serving beans hot as a side dish, cook them just before serving or reheat them in butter or garlic and olive oil just before serving.

Fresh shell beans are worth seeking out

If you've only ever eaten dried beans, fresh shell beans will be a revelation. There are thousands of varieties, in many beautiful colors and patterns, that taste creamy and flavorful when cooked. Look for

them in farmers' markets and specialty stores.

Shell beans are at their best when the pods are full and slightly soft, indicating the beans inside are mature but not dry. Avoid pods that are withered or have watery or brown spots. Keep shell beans at room temperature for a few days, or up to a week in the refrigerator in a paper bag to allow for a little air circulation.

To prepare shell beans, break open the pods along the natural seams and use your thumb to coax out the beans.

To cook shell beans, simmer them until tender in unsalted water or low-salt stock (at this stage, salt can toughen beans) with half an onion and a small bundle of bay leaves, fresh thyme, and parsley stems. The exception is fava beans, which have a tough outer skin that needs to be removed. Before simmering, blanch shelled favas in boiling water for a minute or two, drain, and put them into an ice bath so the tough skins will slip off easily.

Once shell beans are simmered until tender, they're ready to be marinated for a salad, tossed with pasta, or puréed with olive oil for a delicious spread.

Alan Tangren, formerly the forager for Chez Panisse in Berkeley, California, now heads the restaurant's pastry department. ♦

Fava beans

are a different species of shell bean (*Vicia faba*), and thus are only distantly related to other shell beans. Choose pods that are firm and bright green and that show distinctive bumps from the beans within.

Calypso beans

are speckled and playful looking, but their colors fade when cooked. For a light, delicious bean gratin, moisten cooked, seasoned beans with stock, top them with breadcrumbs, and bake.

Tongues of Fire

are part of a larger category of red-striped shell beans called French horticultural beans. Like Calypsos, their speckling will fade during cooking. Combine Tongues of Fire with garlic, shallots, tomatoes, and basil in a salad or pasta.

Cannellini

are the classic Italian shell beans. Cooked cannellini are especially good for minestrone and salads because they hold their shape and have a deliciously creamy texture.

Do you have a shortcut for a time-consuming cooking task, a novel use for an old kitchen tool, or an unusual way to stay organized in the kitchen? Write to Tips, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506. Or send your tip by e-mail to fc@taunton.com. We pay for tips we publish.

For easy-access flour, use a spice jar

I often need just a spoonful of flour for sauces or a sprinkle for rolling out pastry. Rather than haul out a large bin of flour, I now use a smaller container that's got a perfect lid for this purpose. The lids of many extra-large or value-size spice containers have one hole for spooning and another for sprinkling, and they seal shut with snap-top lids. I thoroughly wash and dry the container, and then I fill it with flour.

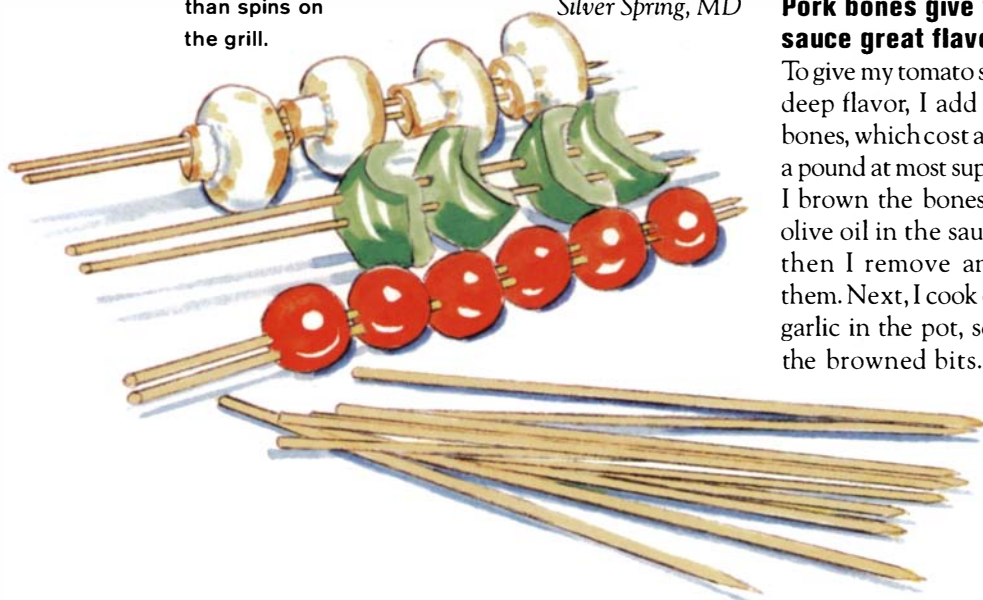
—Elizabeth Talbert,
Fort Wayne, IN

Use two skewers for kebabs

When preparing kebabs of meat, seafood, or vegetables, pierce the food with two parallel skewers. This way, the food turns in unison when you turn the skewers with tongs, rather than spinning around the axis of a single skewer. The food cooks evenly and the kebabs are easier to manipulate.

—Brian Patterson,
Silver Spring, MD

Use two skewers per kebab so the food turns rather than spins on the grill.



Fill an empty oversize spice jar with flour for when you need just a sprinkle for pastry or a spoonful for sauces.

Tenderest green beans fall to the bottom

Rather than pay extra for slender, elegant *haricots verts*, I go directly to the green bean bin and start digging. The best beans are the smallest ones, and these young beans inevitably collect at the bottom of the bin. It takes a few minutes more to fill my bag, but it's certainly worth it.

—Sumner O'Keefe,
Deerfield, MA

Pork bones give tomato sauce great flavor

To give my tomato sauce a full, deep flavor, I add pork neck bones, which cost about \$1.50 a pound at most supermarkets. I brown the bones in a little olive oil in the saucepot, and then I remove and reserve them. Next, I cook onions and garlic in the pot, scraping up the browned bits. The pork

bones go back in the pot with my tomatoes and other ingredients. You can take the bones out before using the sauce. But if I'm serving meatballs and sausage with my spaghetti, I'll serve the neck bones, too. The meat, though scant, cooks up tender and delicious.

—Joan McAllister,
Brookfield, Connecticut

Rolling perfect pie crusts

As noted in your pie article in *Fine Cooking* #29, rolling out pie and tart crusts between two sheets of kitchen parchment (I use waxed paper) has certain advantages. You use less flour, which keeps your crust from getting tough and keeps your counter clean. Measuring is also easier—I draw the appropriate size circle or square directly on the paper, using the pie or tart pan as a guide.

One more tip is to use the paper to help transfer the dough to the pan. Simply peel off the top sheet of the parchment or waxed paper, slide your hand under the papered side, and flip the dough onto the pie pan. When the dough is properly aligned, peel off the paper. The dough is more cooperative if you chill it briefly while it's still between the sheets of paper.

—Alice Smart,
Whispering Pines, NC

Keep baking powder dry and active

Don't be tempted to dip a wet or even slightly moist measuring spoon into a can of baking powder. Moisture, and even humidity, will deactivate the powder. To test baking powder's potency, add a teaspoon of baking powder to a ½ cup of warm water. If the mixture fizzes and bubbles, the baking

powder is still active. If not, it's time to get rid of it. (The strength of baking soda, on the other hand, can be tested by adding it to vinegar; if it foams, it's still usable.)

—Catherine Moulton,
Dayton, OH

Roast peppers on a chimney starter

Roasting bell peppers on the grill always seemed like a good idea but I never found a way to fit it into the flow of things. Finally I realized that I could use the heat coming out the top of my chimney starter to roast the peppers before I started grilling anything else.

When the coals in the chimney starter have burned for 10 minutes and flames are



Put the chimney starter to a second use by roasting a red pepper over it when the coals are hot.

appearing on the top, I put a small grate on top of the starter and roast a pepper on it. You could also hold the pepper over the flames with tongs as you would on a gas burner. It's so easy that I almost always plan to roast a pepper or two when I'm starting up the grill.

—Carol Hiebert, Downs, IL

Soak and freeze your bamboo skewers

To have bamboo skewers always ready for grilling, soak a bundle of skewers in water for 20 minutes, drain them, lightly pat them dry, and then wrap them in plastic wrap. Secure with a rubber band or put them in a bag and keep


them in the freezer. You'll always have soaked skewers ready for the grill.

—Dorothy Patton,
Salt Spring Island,
British Columbia

Food processor blade stays put while pouring

How many times have I struggled to pour out the contents of my food processor bowl without letting the blade fall out, too? I finally discovered the solution in the video that came with my Cuisinart. Just plug your finger into the hole under the bowl and the blade will remain secure while you pour or scoop out the contents.

—Sierra Decatur,
Cheshire, CT ♦



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Look for a golden crust and caramelized vegetable juices on the sides of the pan—two signs of a perfectly baked gratin. Here, it's zucchini and summer squash.



Summer Vegetable Gratin with Intense Flavor

Concentrate the flavor of fresh garden vegetables by layering them with herbs and cheese and baking them until melting and delicious

BY SUSIE MIDDLETON



Cut the vegetables evenly, on the bias, so your gratin looks good and cooks evenly.



Let the sliced tomatoes sit for a bit and then drain off the juices.

Summer's here, and like many cooks, I'll soon be faced with the what-to-do-with-the-excess-garden-vegetables challenge. I can't say that I'm crazy about zucchini bread, and I can't keep feeding the extra tomatoes to my dog (he gobbles them up like candy). Fortunately, I've found a delicious solution that uses large amounts of these vegetables: a summer vegetable gratin—layers of fresh tomatoes and other produce like eggplant, zucchini, or squash, with a bit of cheese, a generous amount of fresh herbs, a drizzle of olive oil, and a crunchy breadcrumb topping, all melted together by slow roasting.

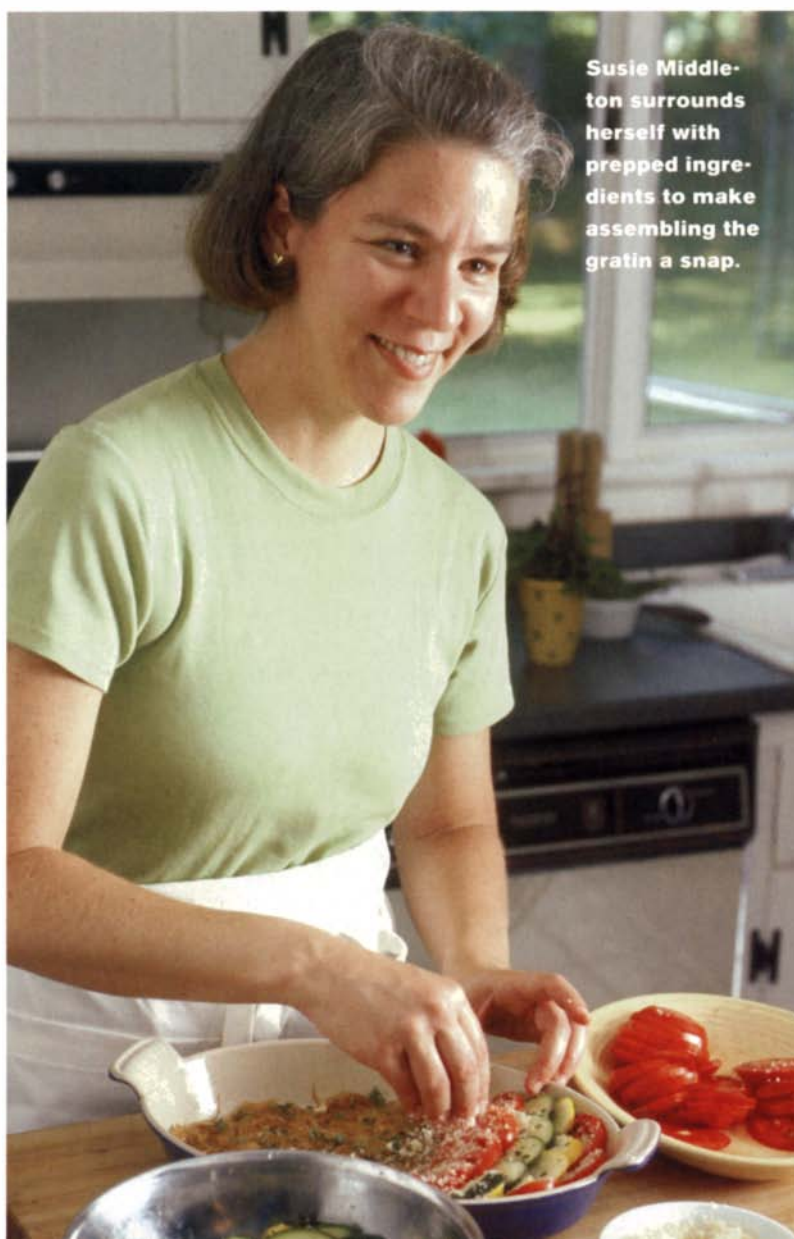
As the gratin cooks, the vegetables shrink, releasing their moisture and concentrating their flavor. The finished dish is a hearty blend of flavors that can stand on its own as dinner with some crusty bread, or that can be the perfect side dish for grilled meats. Leftovers, serendipitously, are better than the first day's meal.

Five steps to perfect summer gratins

Vegetable gratins aren't hard to make; they just take a little prep time and a little layering handiwork to fit them in the pan. In fact, the only way you can really ruin one of these is by *undercooking* it. The longer the gratin is in the oven, the more its flavors develop.

First, you need the right dish. I'd like to say that this is the excuse you needed to buy a beautiful earthenware *tian* made in the South of France. (A *tian* is the French name for an ovenproof earthenware dish, used to cook all kinds of gratins.) But I won't, because these recipes will taste just as good in a 7x11-inch Pyrex dish. An oval dish looks pretty, but any heavy, shallow, 2-quart, ovenproof dish will work.

Next, choose the freshest vegetables and herbs. In summer, this shouldn't be hard, but I've found that



Susie Middleton surrounds herself with prepped ingredients to make assembling the gratin a snap.



Add full flavor with a first layer of caramelized onions.



Lay down alternating rows of vegetables, sprinkling cheese in between. Occasionally give the rows a gentle push to compact them.

when I make gratins with zucchinis and squash from the grocery store (cold-stored for who knows how long) and with those winter tomatoes harvested millions of miles away, even these long-cooked gratins suffer in flavor. This doesn't stop me from making them in winter, but they taste best in summer.

To take advantage of the best vegetables and herbs you can find, don't feel constrained by the ingredient lists in the recipes here. Once you've followed one or two of the recipes to learn the method, take a look at the chart at right for inspiration to customize your own gratin. This is a great way to use all those funny round and twisted squash or tiny eggplant from the farmers' market, or even freshly harvested baby potatoes. At the start of the summer, you can use the first green tomatoes. To complement your produce, make sure that your other ingredients, including the olive oil and cheese, are of the best quality. Their flavors will play a dominant role in the finished dish.

Sharpen your knife and prep your vegetables. Most of these gratins start with a layer of caramelized onions or leeks, so slice those first and start sautéing them slowly while you prepare your other ingredients. Partially cook potatoes and eggplant before using them in the gratins; otherwise, they never seem to get fully cooked in the gratin, probably because of their low moisture content. I roast eggplant slices in the oven (see the Eggplant & Tomato Gratin recipe at right), and I parboil potatoes.

Next, slice your zucchini and squash on the bias into nice thin ovals (if they're particularly thick, cut them in half first), discarding the ends. Try for even 1/4-inch slices. Fatter pieces won't cook as evenly or layer as tightly, but at the same time, don't go paper-



Finish assembling the gratin with a drizzle of olive oil and a top coat of Parmesan and fresh thyme.

thin or the vegetables will melt away. Be sure to toss raw zucchini and squash with olive oil (a coating of fat helps conduct heat around the vegetables and will ensure they get fully cooked). Use a serrated knife to cut the tomatoes into slices that are also quite thin, but not so thin that they fall apart. Put the tomatoes on a shallow plate to let some of their juices drain. Trim and mince the herbs and then arrange all the prepped ingredients in small bowls and shallow plates around your oiled baking dish.

With all the prepped vegetables around you, begin assembling the gratin. Spread the sautéed onions or leeks in one thin layer in the dish. Then, starting at one (narrow) end of the dish, arrange a row of vegetable slices, slightly overlapping one another, across the width of the dish. Prop up the row at a 60-degree angle to the dish. Sprinkle generously with cheese (and anything else the recipe calls for) and lay down a row of the next vegetable, overlapping the first by at least two-thirds. As you work your way along the dish, push the rows back towards the end of the dish where you started. By compacting the vegetables this way, you should get most of what you've sliced into the pan, but by the very nature of this hand-crafting, you'll almost always wind up with a few odd leftover slices. Don't forget to top the finished gratin with a drizzle of olive oil, a good covering of breadcrumbs, and extra cheese.

Cook the gratin until it's well-browned and greatly reduced in volume. These gratins usually cook perfectly in about an hour and ten minutes in a 375°F oven. But after testing them in four different home kitchens, I have to say that cooking time and oven temperature aren't the best way to determine doneness: looking at them is. (Every home oven I used was either "slow" or "fast" compared to my own—who knows which was correctly calibrated?—and each gratin cooked in a different amount of time.)

In any case, it's wise to get into the habit of learning how to judge doneness without depending on cooking times, and these gratins give you some good visual clues. After several minutes in the oven, the gratins begin to bubble as the vegetables release their moisture. The bubbling becomes quite vigorous and,

as the vegetable juices reduce, the bubbling lessens. When the gratins are close to being done, the bubbles are just visible around the edges of the pan. (You can also tilt the pan to see how much juice collects at the end.) The top of the gratin will be well-browned, and the mound of vegetables will have shrunk and pulled away from the sides of the pan.

Let the whole dish rest for at least 15 minutes before serving. If there are still a lot of juices in the pan, you can spoon servings out with a slotted spoon. But don't discard the juices. Leave the leftovers in the juices overnight; then reheat them the next day. The wonderful caramelized flavor from the roasted juices will be even better. In fact, you can even fully cook these gratins several hours ahead, let them cool, and reheat them again before serving.

RECIPES

Eggplant & Tomato Gratin with Mint, Feta & Kalamata Olives

I like to leave eggplant unpeeled, as the purple skins make for a pretty gratin, but since eggplant skin can get a little tough, I've included a suggestion on how to partially peel eggplant, culled from Ayla Algar's terrific cookbook, *Classical Turkish Cooking* (HarperCollins). For a change of pace, try this gratin in four individual dishes, rather than one large one. *Serves six to eight as a side dish; four as a main dish.*

FOR THE EGGPLANT:

2 lb. eggplant

2½ Tbs. olive oil

½ tsp. coarse salt *(Ingredient list continues)*

Customizing your summer vegetable gratin

Choose your own combination of summer vegetables, herbs, and cheeses to create a layered gratin.

BOTTOM LAYER

onions
(yellow or red, thinly sliced and sautéed)
leeks
(thinly sliced and sautéed)
fennel
(thinly sliced and sautéed)
bell peppers and onions
(thinly sliced and sautéed)
garlic
(minced and added to any of the above at the end of sautéing)

VEGETABLES

tomatoes
(vine-ripened red, yellow, orange, or green tomatoes, or plum tomatoes)
zucchini, golden zucchini, yellow squash, pattypan squash
eggplant
(globe or Japanese, purple or white), roasted
potatoes
(Red Bliss, fingerlings, or other waxy varieties), parboiled

CHEESE

parmigiano reggiano
feta
fresh goat cheese
Gruyère
mozzarella
fontina

FRESH HERBS

thyme
oregano
rosemary
basil
mint
parsley
savory
lavender (used in small amounts with other herbs)
sage

TOPPING

(a drizzle of olive oil plus...)

breadcrumbs mixed with olive oil or butter
breadcrumbs mixed with parmigiano or other cheese
breadcrumbs mixed with minced garlic, chopped herbs, and olive oil or butter



For the best texture, roast the eggplant on parchment until lightly browned and somewhat shrunken.



Bake gratins in individual serving dishes for a change. This eggplant, tomato, mint, and feta gratin, with a topping of pine nuts and breadcrumbs, makes a substantial meatless main dish.

FOR THE ONIONS:

2 Tbs. olive oil
2 medium onions (14 oz. total), thinly sliced
2 cloves garlic, minced

TO ASSEMBLE THE GRATIN:

1¼ lb. ripe red tomatoes, cored and cut into ¼-inch slices
¼ cup plus 1 Tbs. chopped fresh mint
6 oz. (1 cup) crumbled feta cheese
⅓ cup pitted and quartered kalamata olives
Coarse salt
Freshly ground black pepper to taste
1½ Tbs. olive oil
⅓ cup fresh breadcrumbs mixed thoroughly with 1 tsp. olive oil and ⅓ cup chopped toasted pine nuts

To cut and cook the eggplant—Trim the ends from the eggplant and, using a vegetable peeler, peel off ½-inch strips of skin along the length of the eggplant every ½ inch or so. (Or leave the eggplant unpeeled, if you like.) Cut the eggplant crosswise into ¾-inch slices and cut the widest slices in half.

Heat the oven to 450°F. Cover two baking sheets with parchment. Lightly brush the parchment with olive oil. Arrange the eggplant slices in one layer on the parchment, brush them with the remaining oil, and season with the ½ tsp. salt. Roast until the slices are lightly browned and somewhat shrunken, 25 min., rotating the pans once after 12 min. Let cool. Reduce the oven temperature to 375°F.

To cook the onions—In a medium skillet, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the onions and sauté, stirring frequently, until limp and golden brown, about 20 min. Reduce the heat to medium-low if they're browning too quickly. Add the garlic and sauté until

soft and fragrant, 1 to 2 min. Spread the onions and garlic evenly in the bottom of an oiled 2-qt. shallow gratin dish (preferably oval). Let cool.

To assemble the gratin—Put the tomato slices on a shallow plate to drain for a few minutes and then discard the collected juices. Sprinkle 1 Tbs. of the mint over the onions. Starting at one end of the baking dish, lay a row of slightly overlapping tomato slices across the width of the dish; sprinkle with some of the mint and some of the feta. Next, lay a row of eggplant slices against the tomatoes (overlapping the first row by two-thirds). Sprinkle again with mint and feta. Repeat with alternating rows of tomato and eggplant slices, seasoning each as you go, and occasionally pushing the rows back. Tuck the quartered kalamata olives randomly between tomato and eggplant slices.

When the gratin is full, sprinkle the vegetables with about ½ tsp. salt and any remaining mint and feta. Season lightly with pepper, drizzle with the olive oil, and cover with the breadcrumb and pine nut mixture. Cook until well-browned all over and the juices have bubbled for a while and reduced considerably, 65 to 70 min. Let cool for at least 15 min. before serving.

Zucchini & Summer Squash Gratin with Parmesan & Fresh Thyme

For this gratin, use all the interesting green and yellow summer squashes (pattypan, scallop, crookneck, butterstick) you find at the farmers' market. *Serves six to eight as a side dish; four as a main dish.*

FOR THE ONIONS:

2 Tbs. olive oil
2 medium onions (14 oz. total), thinly sliced

TO ASSEMBLE THE GRATIN:

1¼ lb. small ripe tomatoes, cored and cut into ¼-inch slices
¾ lb. (about 2 small) zucchini or other green summer squash, cut into ¼-inch slices on the bias
¾ lb. (about 2 small) yellow summer squash or golden zucchini, cut into ¼-inch slices on the bias
3 Tbs. olive oil
¼ cup fresh thyme leaves
1 tsp. coarse salt
1¼ cups freshly grated parmigiano reggiano
Freshly ground black pepper to taste

To cook the onions—Follow the directions for cooking onions in the Eggplant & Tomato Gratin recipe at left. Spread the onions evenly in the bottom of an oiled 2-qt. shallow gratin dish (preferably oval). Let cool.

To assemble the gratin—Heat the oven to 375°F. Put the tomato slices on a shallow plate to drain for a few minutes and then discard the collected juices. In a medium bowl, toss the zucchini and squash slices with 1½ Tbs. of the olive oil, 2 Tbs. of the thyme, and ½ tsp. of the salt. Reserve half of the cheese for the top of the gratin. Sprinkle 1 Tbs. of the thyme over the onions in the gratin. Starting at one end of the baking dish, lay a row of slightly overlapping tomato slices across the width of the dish and sprinkle with a little of the cheese. Next, lay a row of zucchini, overlapping the tomatoes by two-thirds, and sprinkle with cheese. Repeat with a row of squash, and then repeat rows, sprinkling each with cheese, until the gratin is full.

Season lightly with pepper and the remaining ½ tsp. salt. Drizzle the remaining 1½ Tbs. olive oil over all. Combine the reserved cheese with the remaining 1 Tbs. thyme and sprinkle this over the whole gratin. Cook until well-browned all over and the juices have bubbled for a while and reduced considerably, 65 to 70 min. Let cool for at least 15 min. before serving.

Red Potato & Tomato Gratin with Leeks, Gruyère & Rosemary

Try this gratin with Yukon Gold potatoes or substitute some of the red tomatoes with yellow, orange, or even green tomatoes. *Serves six to eight as a side dish; four as a main dish.*

FOR THE LEEKS:

1½ Tbs. olive oil
3 cups sliced leeks (about 3 large, white and pale green parts only), washed thoroughly

FOR THE POTATOES:

1¼ lb. red potatoes, unpeeled, cut into ¼-inch slices
½ tsp. coarse salt; more for boiling the potatoes
1½ Tbs. olive oil
2 tsp. chopped fresh rosemary

TO ASSEMBLE THE GRATIN:

1 tsp. chopped fresh rosemary
1¼ lb. ripe tomatoes, cored and cut into ¼-inch slices
1¾ cups grated Gruyère cheese
½ tsp. coarse salt
Freshly ground black pepper to taste
1½ Tbs. olive oil
⅔ cup fresh breadcrumbs mixed with 2 tsp. olive oil

To cook the leeks—Heat the olive oil in a medium skillet (preferably nonstick) over medium heat. Add

the leeks and sauté, stirring frequently, until limp and lightly browned, about 15 min. Spread the leeks evenly in the bottom of an oiled 2-qt. shallow gratin dish (preferably oval). Let cool.

To cook the potatoes—In a medium saucepan, cover the potato slices with well-salted water and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to a gentle boil and cook for 5 min. or until the potatoes are just barely tender. Drain and rinse under cold water until cool. Pat dry. Toss the potatoes with the salt, olive oil, and rosemary.

To assemble the gratin—Heat the oven to 375°F. Sprinkle ½ tsp. of the chopped rosemary over the leeks. Starting at one end of the baking dish, lay a row of slightly overlapping tomato slices across the width of the dish. Prop the tomatoes against the dish at a 60-degree angle. Cover the row of tomatoes with a generous sprinkling of Gruyère. Next, arrange a row of potato slices over the tomatoes. Sprinkle again with Gruyère. Repeat with alternating rows of tomatoes and potatoes, sprinkling each with cheese, until the gratin is full.

Sprinkle about ½ tsp. salt and the remaining ½ tsp. rosemary over all and season with pepper. Drizzle with the olive oil. Mix any remaining Gruyère with the breadcrumb mixture and spread this over the whole gratin. Cook until the gratin is well-browned all over and the juices have bubbled for a while and reduced considerably, 60 to 65 min. Let cool for at least 15 min. before serving.

Parboil potatoes for summer vegetable gratins.

Drain and cool gently under cold running water.



Susie Middleton is an associate editor for Fine Cooking. ♦



A glass baking dish shows off the layers in a rosemary-scented red potato and Gruyère gratin that has a bottom layer of caramelized leeks.



Who'll get the bone? Thick, juicy, and tender, grilled porterhouse is a meat lover's joy.

Flank steak needs an occasional flip for even browning, so Steve Johnson stays close at hand.



Perfectly

The right cut and a smartly built fire can blaze the way to tender, juicy beef with just a hint of smoke

BY STEVE JOHNSON

Ask any chef what he likes to eat on his night off, and I predict that you'll hear the same response: a steak. Surprised? You shouldn't be. After working with food all week long, restaurant chefs like myself crave an easy, delicious dinner that we don't have to deconstruct to enjoy. In the summertime especially, there's nothing quite as satisfying as a beautiful steak grilled over a hardwood fire. The ritual of building the fire, the aroma of smoke, and the mouthwatering flavor of grilled beef all contribute to the uncomplicated pleasure of this summer tradition.

If you've ever grilled a steak over a live fire, you know what I'm talking about. And if you haven't, read on. I'll give you a few simple guidelines—from choosing the right cut to setting up the fire—that will give you the perfect results you're looking for.

Rich marbling means succulent steaks

If you begin with good-quality beef and the right cut, your grilled steaks will shine without any elaborate flavorings or tenderizers. The USDA's grading system gives you a good way to assess quality: beef that's labeled "prime" is superior; "choice" is runner-up. "Select" is third—I don't recommend it for a steak. The grading designations are largely determined by the amount of visible fat that's streaked throughout the muscle tissue, called marbling. Beef that's richly marbled gets a higher grade; it's more tender, juicy, and flavorful because the intramuscular fat melts and bastes the flesh during cooking. Also, since fat insulates, marbling provides some insurance against overcooking. Look for small, evenly distributed specks of fat rather than larger and sparser ones.

Grilled Steaks

For this article, I've picked three steaks that I love to grill: rib-eye, porterhouse, and flank (which is flavorful and quite lean, so you won't see rich marbling). Consult the chart on p. 33 for specific grilling information about each cut. To learn more about these beef cuts, see Basics, p. 72.

Building the fire: forget the pyramid

After years of professional and backyard grilling, I'm still fascinated by the details that go into building a successful fire, and I still have to pay attention.

For flexibility, build a fire that offers a range of temperatures at all times. You need to be able to move the food around if there are flare-ups, and you need to account for thicker and thinner parts of the steaks. At my restaurant's long, galley-like grill, we always have one section of coals that are just revving up while another section is peaking and yet another is fading. You can create the same effect on your backyard grill by lighting the fire on one side of the grill and letting it "walk" across the coals. When the coals on the side that were lit first are dying, those on the opposite side—which started burning last—will be hottest. This gives you a longer window for grilling and more control over the heat. For gas grilling, set one burner to high and

the other to medium, and add some wood chips for smoky flavor.

I use a combination of hardwood logs and lump hardwood charcoal (*not* charcoal briquettes). The charcoal provides fast, high heat, and the smoking wood burns more slowly and adds aroma and flavor. (Look for natural lump charcoal in hardware and gourmet stores. To order by mail, see Sources, p. 76).

Arrange the wood and coals in an even layer, and don't touch them once they're lit. Every time you mess with the fire, you alter its integrity, disrupting the flow of oxygen and knocking calories out of the system. For this reason, I don't recommend the traditional method of stacking the coals, igniting them, and then spreading them out. This pyramid method also hinders you from getting a range of temperatures.

To set up the grill, follow the photos below. The coals should cover an area that's at least a few inches larger than all the steaks you'll cook at one time. The grill grate should sit three to four inches above the coals.

To judge when the fire is ready, look at the coals and use the hand test. When the flames subside and the charcoal glows red with some ash starting to appear, the fire is hot enough for rib-eye and flank

Set up the grill, light it on one side, and let the fire "walk"



Set one or two hardwood logs (if using them), in the grill, and then pour the charcoal on top. Set up a chimney starter and light the newspaper stuffed in its bottom.



When the coals in the chimney are covered with ash, pour them all out on one side of the grill.



Leave the coals undisturbed as the fire "walks" across the grill, giving you areas of greater and lesser heat.



The coals at center—glowing red, turning gray, but no longer flaming—are hot and ready for rib-eye or flank. The ash-covered coals in back have cooled to medium hot and are ready for a porterhouse.

steak. At that point, you should be able to hold your hand a few inches above the grate for one second. Shortly thereafter, the embers will be completely covered in ash, a sign that they're losing heat. That's medium high—perfect for a thick porterhouse.

It's fine to season the meat with herbs or spices up to an hour before grilling, but don't salt them until the last minute. Salt draws out moisture and will dry out the steaks if added too soon. Before putting the steaks on the fire, bring them to room temperature and rub oil on the grill grate.

Once the steaks are on, you don't need to hover over them like an overprotective mother, but you do need to be ready to juggle the position of the steaks when necessary. Thinner parts of each cut, such as the tenderloin side of a porterhouse or the tapered end on flank steak, need to stay over a less intense part of the fire so they don't overcook. Also, if there are flare-ups (caused by fat dripping onto hot coals), move the steak to another part of the grill until the flames die. Besides being dangerous, flare-ups can burn the surface and cause unhealthy compounds to form on the steak. Try not to flip the steaks more than once (flank is the exception) because that

erring on the side of undercooking since you can always cook the steaks longer, if necessary. The steaks will continue to cook a few more degrees once they're off the heat. And after grilling a few steaks, you'll know what medium rare feels like without having to double-check by cutting into the meat. One more hint: when drops of red juices appear on the surface of a rib-eye or porterhouse steak (but not flank steak), the meat is medium. So if you see those juices and you wanted medium rare or rare, you've missed your chance.

Serve steaks plain, or dress them up

Each of these three cuts of beef is delicious grilled and served as is, along with a salad and something like baked potatoes or garlic bread. If you'd like to enhance the meal, try pairing the steaks with the recipe I suggest for each cut: Roquefort butter for the rib-eye, peppery harissa for the porterhouse, or an Asian spice rub and soy-sesame sauce for the flank steak.

RECIPES

Grilled Rib-Eye...

One steak is more than enough for one hungry person. Set the table with sharp steak knives. *Serves three to four.*

- 2 Tbs. freshly ground black pepper**
- 1 Tbs. fresh thyme leaves**
- 1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil**
- 2 boneless rib-eye steaks, about 20 oz. each (1½ inches thick)**
- 1 Tbs. coarse salt**
- Roquefort Butter (optional; see recipe at right)**

In a small bowl or dish, combine the black pepper, thyme, and olive oil and rub equal amounts of the mixture on both sides of each steak. Set aside and prepare the grill.

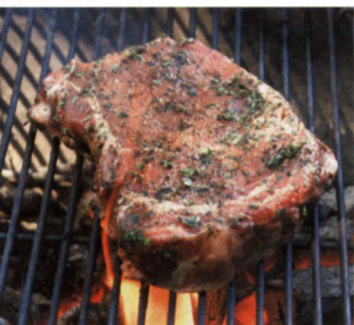
When the fire is hot (you'll be able to hold your hand just above the grate for 1 second), sprinkle both sides of the

steaks with the salt. Grill the steaks on one side for 5 to 6 min. If there are flare-ups, move them to another spot on the grill. Turn the steaks and finish cooking on the second side for 3 to 4 min. They should be rare to medium rare at this point.

Remove the steaks from the grill and transfer to a clean serving platter to rest for 3 or 4 min. so the meat relaxes and the juices redistribute.

If you like, serve with a generous tablespoon of Roquefort Butter on each steak, letting the butter

Flare-ups happen. When they do, slide the steak to another part of the grill.



This perfectly grilled rib-eye has benefitted from a few minutes' rest, allowing the juices to redistribute and the Roquefort butter to soften.

would disrupt the caramelization and the formation of a crust. And when you do the flipping, use tongs or another implement that won't puncture the meat and let the juices escape.

Over a hot grill, the steaks will cook quickly, going from very soft (very rare) to somewhat soft with a bit of a spring (medium) to quite firm (well done). Get in the habit of touching the steaks often and cutting into them when you think they're done,

A guide to grilling steaks

CUT	Rib-eye	Porterhouse	Flank
DESCRIPTION	laced with fat; very juicy and tender; boneless	consists of larger, fattier sirloin muscle and tenderloin muscle, separated by a bone	lean, boneless cut with distinctive long fibers running end to end
GRILL TEMPERATURE	hot (hand over grate for 1 second)	medium hot (hand over grate for 2 seconds)	hot (hand over grate for 1 second)
GRILLING TIME	for 1 1/2-inch thick steak, 5 to 6 min. first side; 3 to 4 min. second side	for 2-inch thick steak, 8 to 10 min. first side 6 to 8 min. second side; keep tenderloin section over less intense heat	for 1 1/2 lb. steak, 8 min. total, flipping steak several times for even browning; keep tapered end over less intense heat
CARVING SUGGESTION	serve whole or cut in half	cut around the bone, slice the meat, and reassemble	slice very thinly across the grain on a 45-degree angle

soften slightly on the cooked steak for a minute or two. At this point, the steak will have advanced half a degree to a perfect medium rare.

...with Roquefort Butter

Yields about 1 1/2 cups.

1/2 lb. (2 sticks) unsalted butter, at room temperature
2 shallots, sliced thin (about 2/3 cup)
1 clove garlic, minced
4 oz. Roquefort cheese, crumbled
1 tsp. fresh thyme leaves
1 Tbs. good-quality red-wine vinegar
Coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Melt 1 Tbs. of the butter in a small skillet over medium heat. Add the shallots and garlic and cook until the shallots are soft, about 5 min. Set aside to cool. Meanwhile, using a mixer or a wooden spoon, beat the remaining butter until soft and creamy. Scrape the butter off the beaters or spoon. Add the cooled shallots and garlic, Roquefort, thyme, and vinegar to the butter and mix together with a rubber spatula. Season with salt and pepper. Taste again for balance, adding a drop more vinegar or a dash more salt if necessary.

This butter mixture, called a compound butter, can be stored in a covered plastic container in the refrigerator for up to 3 days. For longer storage, wrap the butter in plastic wrap or waxed paper, roll into a log 2 inches in diameter, and freeze for up to 2 months.

Grilled Porterhouse...

Unlike a lot of chefs who fan out the porterhouse after carving, I prefer a more organic approach. I cut out

the bone, slice the sirloin and tenderloin, and then reassemble the steak on the plate in its original form. If there's a tail of meat on the porterhouse, fold it to one side and secure with a skewer before grilling. *Serves three to four.*

1 Tbs. freshly ground black pepper
2 shallots, sliced (about 1/2 cup)
1 sprig rosemary, leaves stripped from stem
1 tsp. soy sauce
1 tsp. balsamic vinegar
1 Tbs. olive oil
1 porterhouse steak, about 32 oz. (2 inches thick)
1 Tbs. coarse salt
Ancho Chile Harissa (optional; see recipe on p. 34)

In a bowl, combine the first six ingredients and rub both sides of the steak with equal amounts of the mixture. Set aside and prepare the grill.

When the fire is medium hot (you'll be able to hold your hand just above the grate for 2 seconds), scrape off the shallots and rosemary and drain any liquid. Rub both sides of the steak with salt. Grill the steak on one side for 8 to 10 min., keeping the smaller tenderloin section over a less intense heat. If there are flare-ups, move the steak to another part of the grill. Turn



Carve a porterhouse and then reassemble it so the sirloin (left) and tenderloin portions are obvious and everyone gets a share of both.

the steak and grill for another 6 to 8 min. It should be rare to medium rare at this point.

Transfer the steak to a clean wooden carving platter and let it rest for 3 to 4 min. so the meat relaxes and the juices redistribute. Serve it whole or else carve it, slice it, and reassemble it, saving the juices. Serve with Ancho Chile Harissa, if you like.

...with Ancho Chile Harissa

This North African inspired sauce made with anchos (dried poblano chiles) is spicy but not fiery—a bold complement to the big flavor of porterhouse. Look for ancho chiles in Hispanic or specialty food shops or see Sources, p. 76. *Yields 1 cup.*

5 ancho chiles, seeded and stemmed
3 cloves garlic, chopped
1 tsp. ground cumin
1 tsp. ground coriander
½ cup olive oil
2 tsp. soy sauce
2 tsp. balsamic vinegar
2 Tbs. cold water
Coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Soak the chiles in hot water until soft, about 1 hour. Drain the chiles and transfer to a food processor; add the remaining ingredients. Purée until very smooth. Taste and add more salt and pepper if necessary. Store in a container with a thin layer of olive oil on top to prevent discoloration. The sauce will keep in the refrigerator for 2 weeks.

Grilled Flank Steak...

If you don't use the five-spice rub, be sure to season the steak generously with salt, pepper, olive oil, and perhaps some thyme and rosemary. *Serves three to four.*

1 flank steak, about 24 oz.
Five-Spice Rub (optional; see recipe below)
1 Tbs. vegetable oil
Coarse salt
Sesame-Soy Sauce (optional; see recipe below)

Just before lighting the fire, rub the steak with the Five-Spice Rub, if using, about 1 Tbs. per side.

When the fire is hot (you'll be able to hold your hand just above the grate for 1 second), drizzle both sides of the flank steak with the vegetable oil and sprinkle lightly with salt. Grill the steak for 8 min., flipping it a couple of times during cooking. Be sure to keep the thicker part over the hotter area of the fire and the thinner, tapered end over the cooler area. It should be rare to medium rare at this point. Transfer the steak to a clean wooden carving board to rest for 2 to 3 min. so the meat relaxes and the juices redistribute. To carve, cut very thin slices across the grain and on a 45-degree angle. Drizzle lightly with the Sesame-Soy Sauce, if you like.

...with Five-Spice Rub & Sesame-Soy Sauce

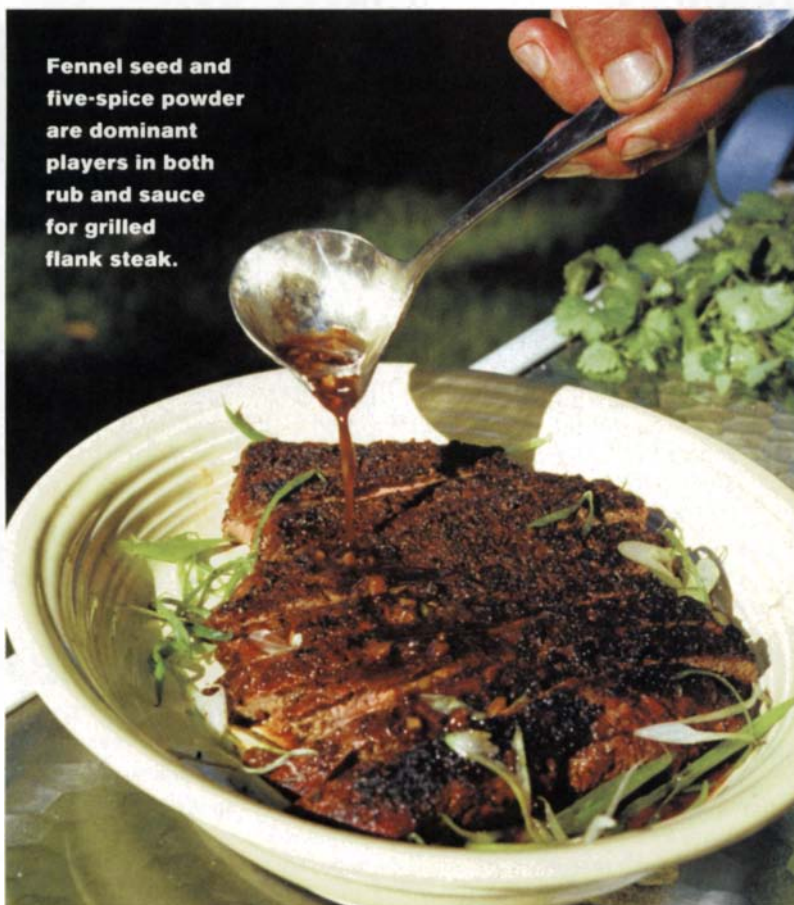
Yields about ½ cup spice rub and about 1 cup sauce.

FOR THE SPICE RUB:
2 Tbs. ground coriander
4 tsp. five-spice powder
¾ tsp. ground fennel seed
½ tsp. ground ginger
2¼ tsp. hot chile powder
½ tsp. ground black pepper
¼ tsp. ground cinnamon
2 Tbs. coarse salt
1 Tbs. brown sugar

FOR THE SAUCE:
⅓ cup toasted sesame oil
1 Tbs. minced fresh ginger
1 Tbs. minced garlic
⅓ cup orange juice
¼ tsp. five-spice powder
¼ tsp. red chile flakes
¼ tsp. ground fennel seed
2 Tbs. balsamic vinegar
2 Tbs. soy sauce
1 Tbs. sugar

To make the rub—In a bowl, thoroughly blend all the spices with the salt and brown sugar; set aside. Store tightly covered in a cool, dry place; the mix will last a few months.

To make the sauce—In a small mixing bowl, whisk together all the ingredients. The sauce keeps for 3 or 4 days in the refrigerator.



Fennel seed and five-spice powder are dominant players in both rub and sauce for grilled flank steak.

Steve Johnson is the chef-owner of The Blue Room in Cambridge, Massachusetts. ♦

Vibrant Thai Salads

Use traditional Thai flavor-layering principles for perfectly balanced, intensely flavored salads

BY SU-MEI YU

If you've ever tried to recreate a dish you tasted in a foreign country, you probably felt that it just didn't taste as good at home as when you were abroad. While it's true that there's nothing like being there, in the case of Thai salads, it's entirely possible to create great, authentic-tasting fare at home, without having to cross the world.

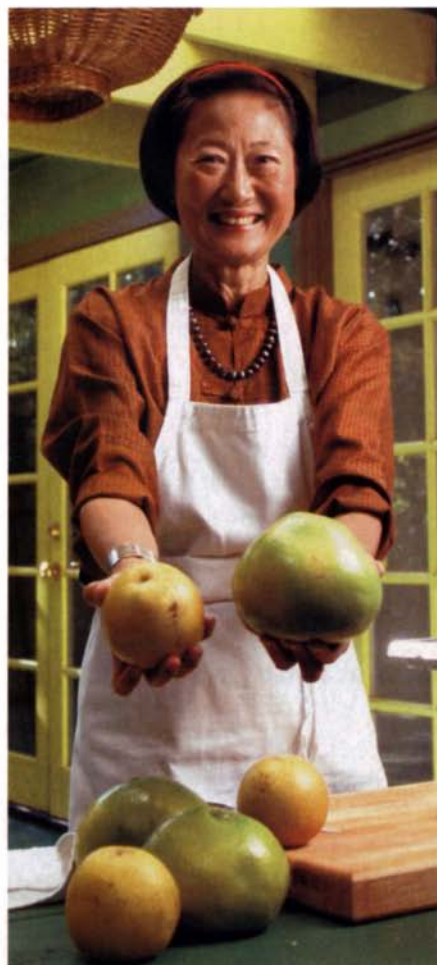
The unusual and exciting nature of Thai food comes from a complex interplay of layered flavors. A Thai salad is a great example of this flavor layering—one dish can taste sweet, tart, and spicy all at once, with chewy, crunchy, and soft textures all playing against each other. With a basic understanding of these flavor-building principles, you too can recreate authentic, vibrant Thai food—in this case, a beef salad, a shrimp salad, and a rice salad—that will taste as good as or better than anything you've ever had in any Thai restaurant (well, except mine, I hope).

Layer textures and flavors

All Thai salads begin with a simple dressing upon which you can build. From there, you begin adding flavors and adding textures.

Mix a dressing based on a sour-salty-sweet trio. I start with the classic blend of lime, fish sauce, and sugar. I create another layer of complexity by adding something spicy, like roasted chiles. Next comes a fruity note, maybe tamarind. You can get even more complex and layer on an additional creamy element, like unsweetened coconut milk.

For texture, balance the primary salad ingredients with supporting ingredients. For the Shrimp & Pomelo Salad on p. 38, I started with soft pomelo and chewy shrimp. Then I added crispy fried shallots, as well as crunchy toasted coconut flakes and crushed peanuts. The idea is to combine a variety of contrasting textures, the more contrasts, the more layers of complexity. Aim for different textures: soft,



Use delicious substitutions for hard-to-find Thai ingredients

If you can't find pomelo, grapefruit is a good stand-in.



Handle pomelo just like grapefruit, separating it into sections...



...and peeling off the pith. You'll notice that a pomelo's pulp is drier and plumper than a grapefruit's.

chewy, crisp, crunchy. After that, you can embellish, if you like, with garnishes that are herbal and clean-tasting (such as fresh mint or basil), smoky (such as fried dried chiles), fruity (lime zest, star fruit, or apple), or earthy (cilantro leaves and stems).

Easy-to-find substitutions give delicious results

If you live near an Asian grocer, you'll find all the authentic ingredients you'll need for these salads. But if not, no problem. Other than fish sauce and lemongrass—essentials of Thai cooking for which there are no substitutes—it's easy to make western substitutions that will give you very successful and delicious results (see the chart on p. 38). And fish sauce and lemongrass are becoming quite easy to find in big supermarkets.

Work ahead, assemble last-minute

These recipes do involve a lot of chopping and pounding. But trust me—the results are worth it. And you can do most of the work ahead.

Dressings keep for weeks, as long as they're tightly covered and stored in the refrigerator. So do all the crispy-fried and roasted ingredients, such as shallots, garlic, and dried chiles. Cook shrimp and meats a day or two ahead and refrigerate them. Slice all fruits and vegetables (except for apple and endive, which quickly turn brown) a few hours ahead and slip them into a zip-top bag with a moist paper towel to keep them fresh.

Intensely flavored Thai salads taste best with rice

You'll notice that I've included cooked rice in all these

recipes. This is because the salads are intensely flavored and thus always eaten with rice. (Thai cooks always serve rice with meals, much like the way western cooks serve bread.)

And a final note on flavors as you build these salads: I advise you to taste as you go. Thai fish sauce is strong and briny, so start with a small amount and adjust the seasoning as the dish develops. As for spice, I've given a range in these recipes. Again, it's important to taste as you go and be conservative until you get a feel for the recipe. At a traditional Thai table, chile powder and chile sauce are always set on the side with

other condiments, so that you can season the dish according to your taste.



Shrimp & Pomelo Salad
is a tantalizing mix
of sweet, sour, chewy,
crispy, and crunchy.

Assembling the Thai Rice Salad



Start by molding four mounds of rice, using a bowl to get a good dome shape.

RECIPES

Southern Thai Rice Salad

If you can find salt-packed anchovies for the dressing, use them—they'll taste much better than oil-packed. For the chile powder, start with $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon and increase the spice according to your taste. *Serves six.*

FOR THE DRESSING:

- 2 or 3 large lemongrass stalks, green parts removed
- 1½-inch piece galangal (or 2-inch piece ginger)
- ½ cup dry salted anchovies, rinsed and patted dry (or 2 oz. oil-packed anchovies, drained)
- 1½ cups water
- 1 cup palm sugar (or light brown sugar)
- 3 or 4 large shallots, peeled and lightly crushed
- 3 or 4 kaffir lime leaves, torn (or grated zest of 2 limes)

FOR THE SALAD:

- 4 cups cooked long-grain rice, at room temperature
- 1 cup blanched green beans, thinly sliced crosswise
- ½ medium head Belgian endive, thinly sliced
- ½ cup thinly sliced arugula
- 1 cup fresh bean sprouts
- 1 cup coarsely grated green mango (or 1 Granny Smith apple, peeled, sliced in matchsticks, mixed with 1 tsp. fresh lemon juice)

Presenting the final dish



Next arrange the main salad ingredients in alternating piles.



Sprinkle with the coconut flakes, lime leaves or zest, and orange zest.



This salad looks beautiful when you arrange it, so be sure to present it before tossing.

Serving

Toss gently and thoroughly so all the flavors and textures are well blended.



- 1 stalk lemongrass (hard outer layers removed), minced
- 5 oz. (1 cup) finely chopped hot-smoked fish, such as salmon, trout, bluefish, sturgeon, or tuna
- 1 cup toasted fresh coconut flakes (see text and sidebar on p. 39, or 1 cup unsweetened coconut flakes, toasted)
- 1 Tbs. thinly sliced kaffir lime leaves (or grated zest of 1 lime)
- 1 Tbs. grated orange zest
- $\frac{3}{4}$ to 2 tsp. dried chile powder
- 2 limes, cut into wedges; more limes for squeezing

To make the dressing—Peel away the hard outer stems of the lemongrass stalks until you reach the inner white and purple section. Halve the stalks lengthwise and then slice them crosswise into 2-inch lengths. Rinse, dry, and then bruise lightly with the side of a large knife or cleaver. Peel the galangal or ginger, cut it into chunks, and bruise it; set it aside with the lemongrass. Bring the anchovies and the water to a boil; cook until the anchovies begin to fall apart, about 10 min. (2 min. if using oil-packed anchovies). Add the lemongrass, galangal or ginger, sugar, shallots, and lime leaves or zest. Boil until the liquid turns syrupy and sticky, about 20 min. Remove the pan from the heat; set aside to cool for 10 min. Strain the dressing and discard the strainer contents. You should have about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of dressing.

To assemble the salad—On a large platter, arrange four dome-shaped mounds of rice. Between the mounds, arrange the green beans, endive, arugula, bean sprouts, and green mango or

Granny Smith apple. Arrange a couple of small piles of minced lemongrass and minced smoked fish in between. Sprinkle with the coconut flakes, lime leaves or zest, and orange zest. Put the dried chile powder in a tiny sauce bowl at one end of the platter. Arrange lime wedges all around. To serve, present the platter and then pour the dressing all over the ingredients on the platter. Sprinkle with the amount of chile powder you desire, reserving some for those who want more. Squeeze the lime wedges over all. Toss thoroughly and serve.

Thai Beef Salad

You'll need to pound the dressing in a mortar and pestle, but the flavors you'll get are worth it. Fish sauce is strong and briny, so start with a few drops and season as you go. If you can't find clear fish sauce, use half the amount of dark fish sauce and add sea salt to taste. Serves six.

FOR THE DRESSING:

- 1 large clove garlic, minced
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ Tbs. minced cilantro stems

(Ingredient list continues)

2 tsp. toasted coriander seeds
 1½ Tbs. sugar
 1 tsp. salt
 2 Tbs. clear fish sauce (or
 1 Tbs. dark fish sauce and
 sea salt to taste)
 Juice of 1 large lime
 7 or more Thai chiles (or 4 or
 more serrano chiles)

FOR THE SALAD:

1 lb. flank steak, trimmed
 ¾ cup pineapple juice
 Vegetable oil
 3 large stalks lemongrass
 (green parts and tough outer
 stalks removed), minced to
 yield ½ cup
 1 Tbs. thinly sliced kaffir lime
 leaves (or grated zest of
 1 lime)
 ½ sweet onion, such as
 Vidalia, very thinly sliced
 ½ small cucumber, peeled,
 seeded, and thinly sliced on the diagonal
 2 cups bite-size pieces romaine lettuce, washed and dried
 1 cup bite-size pieces arugula, washed and dried
 12 small cherry tomatoes, halved
 ¼ cup mint leaves
 ¼ cup cilantro leaves
 6 cups warm cooked jasmine or basmati rice

To make the dressing—With a mortar and pestle, pound the garlic to a paste. Add the cilantro stems and coriander seeds and incorporate them into the paste. Add the sugar and salt; continue pounding. Mix in the fish sauce and lime juice. Add the chiles and pound them lightly until they're crushed but still remain whole. Taste the sauce—it should be intense, with salty, sour, and peppery tastes predominating and a sweet undertone.

To grill the steak—Soak the flank steak in the pineapple juice for at least 1 hour (but no more than 3 hours) and light a hot grill fire. Remove the meat from the juice, reserving the juice for basting, and smear the meat with vegetable oil. Grill the steak, over



Minced lemongrass adds fragrance and texture to Thai Beef Salad.

the hottest part of the flame, searing the meat for 5 min. on each side and basting occasionally. Remove and set aside to rest until cool enough to handle.

To assemble the salad—Slice the steak across the grain, cutting very thin, bite-size slices. Transfer to a bowl and add the minced lemongrass, lime leaves or zest, and the dressing, garnishing with the crushed chiles from the dressing. Mix well and



Thai Beef Salad is intensely flavored and spicy, so serve it with rice (the Thai version of bread).

set aside for 5 or 10 min. to let the flavors marry. In another bowl, gently toss together the onion, cucumber, romaine, and arugula. Just before serving, add the cherry tomato halves, mint, and cilantro to the vegetables and greens. Toss gently. Add the meat mixture, toss gently, and serve the salad with the warm rice.

Shrimp & Pomelo Salad

A pomelo looks somewhat like a grapefruit,

with plumper, drier pulp inside. If you can find pomelos, choose one the way you would a grapefruit: select one that feels heavy for its size. Cherry juice concentrate, a good substitute for tamarind, is available in most health-food stores. When selecting a coconut, shake it to make sure that it's full of juice. Serves four.

FOR THE DRESSING:

2 or 3 dried red hot chiles, soaked in warm water for 15 min. and patted dry
 3 shallots, peeled
 6 cloves garlic, peeled
 Vegetable oil
 2 tsp. bonito flakes (or 1 Tbs. minced hot-smoked fish, such as trout or bluefish)
 2 Tbs. palm sugar (or light brown sugar)
 1 Tbs. clear fish sauce
 3 Tbs. thick tamarind juice (or cherry juice concentrate)

FOR THE SALAD:

1 whole coconut, prepared according to the directions at right, or ¼ cup unsweetened coconut flakes, toasted
 ¼ cup vegetable oil
 2 shallots, thinly sliced
 Pinch salt
 1 pomelo or 1½ large grapefruit (peel and pith removed), sectioned
 1 lb. (3 cups) medium shrimp, peeled, deveined, and steamed until opaque (3 min.)
 2 Tbs. crushed roasted peanuts
 1 or 2 Thai chiles (or serrano chiles), sliced into threads
 7 kaffir lime leaves, sliced into threads (or grated zest of 2 limes)
 6 cups cooked long-grain rice, at room temperature

To make the dressing—Heat the oven to 350°F. Put the dried chiles, shallots, and garlic on separate sheets of foil, drizzle each with a little vegetable oil, and wrap each into a separate packet. Roast the three packets on a baking sheet until the contents of each is soft and golden: the chiles should take about 15 min., the garlic about 25 min., and the shallots

Good substitutes for Asian ingredients

Flavor or texture	Asian ingredient	Western substitution
bitter/crunchy	banana blossom	Belgian endive
salty/dry	bonito flakes	hot-smoked bluefish, trout, or salmon
herby/leafy	cilantro	celery leaves
tart/crunchy	green mango	Granny Smith apple
fragrant/astringent	kaffir lime leaf	grated lime zest
sweet	palm sugar	maple syrup or light brown sugar
tangy/pulpy	pomelo	grapefruit
briny/smooth	shrimp paste	dried, salted anchovies
briny	fermented or dried, salted fish	hot-smoked salmon, trout, or bluefish
fruity	tamarind	cherry juice concentrate, or dried apricots, softened in hot water, then puréed

Coconut 101

Set the baked and cooled coconut (see the text at left) on a hard surface and hit it hard with a hammer.

Catch the juice (and save it to drink). Su-Mei Yu is using a traditional Thai coconut strainer.



Break the coconut meat into manageable chunks with your hands.



Dislodge the meat from the husk carefully with a sharp, thick knife. Wear a thick kitchen mitt to protect your hands.



Peel the hard, dark, outer layer off the white meat with a sharp vegetable peeler. Cut the meat into chunks.



Pulse the chunks of coconut meat into small flakes in a food processor.



about 35 min. When the chiles and shallots are cool enough to handle, chop each coarsely. Put them in a small food processor or mortar and pestle along with the roasted garlic, bonito flakes or smoked fish, palm or brown sugar, fish sauce, and tamarind juice or cherry juice concentrate. Blend or pound until smooth.

To prepare the coconut—If you're using fresh coconut, bake the whole coconut at 375°F for about 15 min. Set it aside to cool. Put the coconut on a hard surface; hit it hard with a hammer to split it in half, taking care to catch the juice, which you can save for drinking. With a sharp, thick knife, carefully dislodge the meat from the husk; wear a kitchen mitt to protect your hands. Peel the hard, dark, outer layer off the white meat. Cut the coconut flesh into small chunks; pulse in a food processor into small flakes. Toast the flakes in a nonstick skillet over medium heat until lightly golden, stirring frequently to prevent burning; let cool. Set aside ¼ cup for the recipe and store the rest of the coconut flakes in a sealed jar; they'll keep for several weeks.

To prepare the salad—In a small skillet over high heat, heat the vegetable oil and add the sliced shallots and salt, stirring constantly to prevent burning. Fry the shallots until crisped and golden, about 2 min.; drain them on paper towels. Arrange the pomelo sections on a serving platter; top with the cooked shrimp. Toss gently with the dressing, taking care not to bruise the fruit. Garnish with ¼ cup toasted coconut flakes, the roasted peanuts, fried shallots, fresh chiles, and lime leaves or zest. Just before serving, mix gently. Serve with the rice.

Su-Mei Yu owns Saffron restaurant in San Diego. She's writing a Thai cookbook to be published by William Morrow next summer. ♦

I've always been crazy about fresh herbs—so crazy, in fact, that I used to raid the Cloisters gardens in Manhattan, stealing a sprig of oregano, rosemary, or thyme just to keep myself in supply.

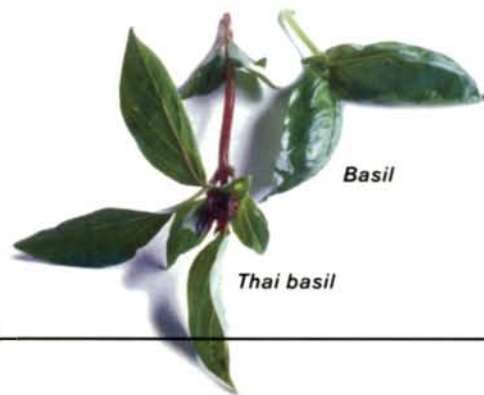
Today I have no need for tactics like that. I'm lucky enough to have my own garden that's full of many of my favorites: thyme, savory, chives, purple sage, spearmint, lavender, and more. And for those herbs that I just can't get to thrive in my front yard, I have another convenient (and legitimate) source: the local supermarket. Nowadays, well-stocked groceries often carry herbs like tarragon and marjoram alongside favorites like basil and rosemary.

Such availability is a dream come true for me, but I've noticed that many people are intimidated by this abundance of choice. How many passionate cooks (professionals as well as amateurs) buy fresh herbs, use maybe a few sprigs, and then proceed to forget about the rest of the bunch until they're dried out, limp, or spoiled? Many, I know. Why do they let these wonderfully fragrant flavorings expire in the back of their refrigerators? Because they don't know how best to store and handle them, and perhaps because they're a little afraid of using them. What herbs go with what food? How do you use them other than as a sprinkle to decorate a dish? When and how should they be added during cooking?

Once you have the answers to those questions, which I'm about to give you, you'll find yourself reaching for that bundle of herbs more and more often, and throwing them out less and less.

Finding and buying fresh herbs

Supermarkets package fresh herbs in various ways: loose in small plastic boxes, fastened in bunches with rubber bands, or sometimes still growing in a pot. No matter the packaging, look for herbs with vibrant color and aroma (open up those boxes for a sniff), and avoid those that are limp or yellowing, have black spots, or don't smell totally fresh and appetizing. I like to buy field-grown basil, parsley, mint, cilantro, and dill when possible—as opposed to greenhouse grown—because they're so much more fragrant. You can recognize field-grown herbs by their larger, harder stalks and leaves. Some chefs prefer the more tender greenhouse herbs because they make a lovely delicate garnish and because they're ready to use straight from the bag.



A Cook's Guide to Fresh Herbs

Learn how to store, handle, and use fragrant herbs to enhance the flavor of any dish

BY ALIZA GREEN



Thyme



Curly parsley

Flat-leaf parsley

Chervil

It's worth exploring other sources for herbs, too, such as Middle Eastern, Latino, and Asian markets, which often carry herbs of higher quality and at lower prices than the supermarket.

Fragile herbs need TLC

Hardy herbs like rosemary, marjoram, and sage will stay green and fragrant for a week or two, as long as they're refrigerated and don't get wet. But tender herbs, such as basil, dill, cilantro, tarragon, and



To store herbs, trim their root ends and wrap loosely in damp paper towels. Store in an airtight plastic bag or container and refrigerate.

chervil, need special attention so they don't blacken or freeze in the refrigerator.

To keep tender herbs at their best, remove any rubber bands or fasteners. Because the roots draw the moisture from the leaves, it's important to trim off the root ends and the lower parts of the stems to prevent the tops from wilting. If the roots are large and prominent, you can save them to flavor soups or stocks. (Southeast Asian cooks chop up cilantro roots along with the leaves, while Jewish cooks like to add parsley roots to chicken soup.)

Wrap the trimmed but unwashed herb bunches loosely in damp paper towels and put them in a heavy-duty zip-top bag filled with a little air, which cushions the herbs. Or even better, seal the towel-wrapped herbs neatly in a plastic container without crushing them. Store the herbs in the warmest part of the refrigerator, which is often the top shelf. Check the herbs daily, using those that look the least perky and discarding any that have begun to spoil.

Freezing fresh herbs generally turns them black and slimy, but if you protect them with a fat, by making a pesto (without the cheese) or an herb butter, for example, they'll be fine.

Wash herbs only when you're ready to use them, because excess moisture shortens their shelf life in the refrigerator. If I can get away without washing them at all, I do. Greenhouse herbs will be cleaner than field-grown and may not need washing. But if the herbs look or feel sandy, I wash

them no matter their origin. To wash herbs, see the photo below.

Chop with a sharp knife or snip with scissors

A sharp knife is imperative for chopping herbs. A dull one will crush and bruise tender leaves, giving you blackened rather than green results. I use scissors to snip off small amounts of tender herbs, especially chives, whose stringy fibers are difficult to cut cleanly with a knife.

The more tender the herb, the closer to cooking time you'll need to chop it. If you chop in advance, cover the herbs with plastic wrap punctured with a few air holes and refrigerate them. You can save left-over chopped herbs for a day or so, but sniff them before using, especially parsley, cilantro, basil, and dill, which are highly perishable when chopped.

Whether you add the herb whole or chopped, or at the start of cooking rather than at the end, depends on both the herb and the effect you want.

If you want the herb to contribute a rounded background flavor, add a sprig at the beginning of cooking. Strong, resinous herbs like marjoram,



To wash herbs, put them in a large bowl of cool water and swish them to release grit. Lift the herbs out of the water with your hands, a sieve, or a skimmer. If you see a lot of grit on the bottom of the bowl, wash the herbs again in a fresh bowl of water. Spin them dry in a salad spinner or gently blot them dry by rolling them up in a clean towel.

thyme, and savory do best when allowed to mellow during the cooking process. To gently release the flavor oils of an herb in a slow-cooking sauce, soup, or stew, lightly crush the sprig before adding it to the liquid. Leaving the leaves on the stem makes it easy to remove the whole herb later.

For a more forthright herb flavor, chop the herb and add it near the end of cooking. The pungent, unmistakable aroma of chopped cilantro seems to dissipate quickly, so I stir it in directly after cook-



ing, which also helps it to retain its bright green color. Sometimes you'll want to emphasize an herb's flavor by adding it both before and after cooking. For my marinara sauce, I add whole sprigs of basil at the start, and then I liven up the basil flavor by adding finely shredded leaves just before taking the sauce off the heat.

Take advantage of the whole herb

When a recipe calls for only one part of the herb plant, I make a point of reserving the remains for another use.

Save tender stems for stocks and woody ones for the grill. Add tender herb stems in small quantities for a mild foundation flavor in chicken stock or fish fumet. Don't get carried away, especially with herbs that contain a lot of chlorophyll (the green coloring) like parsley, cilantro, and dill. Woody stems of strong, resinous herbs can be used instead of wood chips on the grill. Try hot-smoking (cooking slowly in a covered grill so the smoke penetrates the food) a New York sirloin strip steak over thick rosemary stems, as I used to in my restaurant days. Stems from thyme, sage, marjoram, rosemary, and savory all work well.

Deep-fry herb leaves for an elegant, crunchy garnish. Fried flat-leaf or curly parsley is a classic partner for fried fish and seafood. I garnish crab cakes served over a fresh tomato sauce with crispy and tasty



Add woody stems like rosemary, thyme, or sage to the grill as a fragrant stand-in for wood chips.

Tender stems flavor soups and stocks. For easy removal, tie with twine or keep the root intact, as with the cilantro stems on the left.



fried lovage leaves. Whole sage leaves dipped in a simple Italian flour and water batter, called a *pastella*, and then fried in olive oil, are a traditional complement to *fritto misto* (batter-fried meat, seafood, and vegetables).

Search out herb blossoms in season. Especially delicious are lavender-blue chive blossoms, petals separated and sprinkled on a cold vichyssoise. Sweetly perfumed blue-violet sage and borage blossoms make a seasonal salad garnish. Other blossoms, like tiny white thyme, lavender-blue summer savory,



Herb and food pairings: some click, some clash

Herbs are like people: each has its own personality and style. Think about that when you're playing matchmaker with herbs and food. There's nothing wrong with experimenting to discover what these natural marriages are, but since almost every traditional cuisine has done the work before you, why reinvent the wheel? Before you start experimenting, get to know the particular flavor nuances of herbs by first using them in time-honored ways. Then be guided by your own creativity and taste. Here are a few of my favorite herb and food combinations to get you started.



Rosemary

Basil:

- ◆ Make a *salsa cruda* with diced ripe yellow and red tomatoes, red onions, fresh or smoked mozzarella, shredded basil leaves, and fruity olive oil to serve over capellini.
- ◆ Chop citrus fruits, shallots, and basil leaves for a relish to serve on grilled fish such as tuna and mahi-mahi.
- ◆ Make a basil butter and smear it under the husk before grilling or roasting corn.

Bay:

- (I prefer Mediterranean over California bay; remove bay leaves from the dish before serving)
- ◆ Add bay leaves to slow-cooked sauces, stocks, sea-food poaching liquid, or cream- and cheese-based sauces.
 - ◆ Thread fresh bay leaves (soak them in cold water to soften) on beef, chicken, or tuna brochettes before grilling.
 - ◆ Poach pears in red- or white-wine syrup flavored with bay leaves and a strip of orange zest or lemon zest.

Chervil:

- ◆ Try chervil with its relative, the carrot, in a cream of carrot soup or with sautéed carrots and shallots.
- ◆ Make a sauce for red snapper with chopped tomatoes, shallots, olive oil, and chervil.

Cilantro:

- ◆ Add chopped cilantro to tomato-, chile-, and fruit-based salsas to accompany grilled meats, fish, and poultry.
- ◆ Make a curried chicken salad with celery, apples, and chopped cilantro leaves.
- ◆ Stir-fry vegetables and beef and make a sauce with soy sauce, sesame oil, fresh ginger, and chopped cilantro.

Dill:

- ◆ Make a sauce of mustard, oil, sugar, salt, dill, and a dash of

cider vinegar to serve with gravlax, cold-smoked salmon, or shrimp.

- ◆ Add chopped dill to mayonnaise-based salads like potato salad, egg salad, or *salade russe* (cooked vegetables dressed first in vinaigrette, drained, and tossed with dill mayonnaise).

Marjoram:

- ◆ Toss steamed green beans with gently heated *crème fraîche*, lemon zest, and marjoram.
- ◆ Use marjoram in mustard sauces or tomato sauces for stewed rabbit dishes or to season chicken or pork sausages.

Oregano:

- ◆ Cook ground lamb with tomato, red wine, and oregano, top with a cheese-laced creamy custard sauce, and then bake for Greek moussaka.
- ◆ Make a vinaigrette of olive oil, red-wine vinegar, lemon juice, and chopped oregano; toss with greens, feta, tomato, kalamata olives, and egg wedges for a classic Greek salad.

Parsley:

- ◆ Make a chicken salad with lemon zest, toasted pine nuts, currants, chopped parsley, and mayonnaise.
- ◆ Make *gremolata*, a mixture of

finely chopped flat-leaf parsley, garlic, lemon zest, and orange zest, and serve over braised veal shanks or clams steamed in white wine.

- ◆ Make a *persillade*, a combination of finely chopped parsley and garlic, and toss with pan-fried potatoes to accompany grilled steak.

Rosemary:

- ◆ Brush toasted bread with olive oil and finely chopped rosemary before topping with fresh goat cheese, white bean spread, or eggplant caponata.
- ◆ Rub chopped rosemary on aged beef or game birds before grilling or roasting.
- ◆ Stuff a chicken with a few rosemary sprigs, a quartered lemon, and a handful of peeled garlic cloves, roast, and squeeze the lemon over the chicken before serving.

Sage:

- ◆ For a fettuccine sauce, combine and gently heat heavy cream, peas, sage, nutmeg, grated Parmesan, and thin strips of prosciutto. Or add sage leaves to a creamy béchamel sauce and bake with penne and prosciutto.
- ◆ Rub a mixture of chopped sage leaves, crushed black

peppercorns, olive oil, and sea salt on pork or veal before roasting or grilling.

Spearmint:

- ◆ Make a Lebanese toasted pita salad with tomatoes, cucumber, and chopped mint.
- ◆ Add lots of spearmint to tea generously sweetened with sugar, as the Moroccans do.
- ◆ Combine mint with chocolate for a cool note in desserts like mint chocolate chip ice cream, flourless chocolate cake with mint-infused custard sauce (crush the mint leaves and steep in the hot milk before making the custard), or mint-frosted brownies.

Summer savory:

- ◆ Make a gratin of flageolet beans, sautéed onions or shallots, carrots, sprigs of summer savory, and chicken stock. Top with breadcrumbs and more summer savory and bake in a slow oven.

Tarragon:

- ◆ Make a julienne of carrot salad and dress with tarragon leaves, fresh lemon juice, Dijon mustard, chopped shallots, and a light-tasting olive oil.
- ◆ Toss tarragon leaves with fresh sliced white mushrooms, snipped chives, sherry vinegar, and a mild oil like canola.
- ◆ Flavor hollandaise sauce with a reduction of wine vinegar, tarragon, and shallots (basically a béarnaise), and serve with pan-seared steak.

Thyme:

- ◆ Mash chopped thyme with Roquefort cheese and chopped walnuts and serve with grilled steak.
- ◆ Cook sprigs of thyme with French green lentils and use as a bed for sautéed or grilled salmon.

and purple rosemary, taste wonderful mixed with chives and browned butter and then tossed with fresh pasta; sprinkle with grated Parmesan or crumbled fresh goat cheese. I don't like basil or marjoram blossoms as they tend to be bitter, and the pretty white blossoms of Chinese or garlic chives are too tough to eat.

Keeping pesto bright and green

For emerald-green pestos, be sure your food processor blade is sharp so it cuts without crushing the ingredients (if not, bring it to a knife sharpener). Then add the ingredients in the proper order: fat first, herbs last. I start with the oil and then add the garlic and pine nuts, puréeing them completely. Finally, I add the greens, processing them for as short a time as possible so they stay cool and maintain their color.

Try other herbs besides basil in pesto (an Italian word simply meaning paste). Make a Southwest pesto with cilantro, pumpkin seeds, garlic, and aged Monterey Jack or Asiago cheese and a little fresh green chile. In cold weather, I make a sage, parsley, and walnut pesto to stir into a bowl of hearty white bean soup.



Chervil makes this herb salad sing.
Dress lightly with a vinaigrette and serve over prosciutto.

RECIPES

Herb Salad

This herb salad is a refreshing foil to rich cured meats and fish. I like to serve it over large plates of thinly sliced gravlax, prime beef carpaccio, fine Scottish smoked salmon, Bresaola from the Italian Alps, Parma prosciutto, and even seared fresh foie gras. Use only tender herbs in perfect condition, and be sure you include chervil. *Serves six.*

6 cups assorted, carefully picked herb leaves. A good mix would include the following:

- ♦ 2 cups flat-leaf parsley leaves
- ♦ 1 cup basil leaves, larger ones cut into a chiffonade
- ♦ ½ cup tarragon leaves, larger ones cut smaller
- ♦ ½ cup chives, cut in 1-inch lengths
- ♦ ¾ cup baby arugula leaves
- ♦ ¾ cup chervil sprigs
- ♦ ½ cup small cilantro sprigs

Wash the leaves gently and dry them in a salad spinner or in a towel. Lightly toss the leaves in a scant amount of your favorite simple vinaigrette. I like a classic oil and vinegar dressing, using 3 parts fruity olive oil to 1 part mild rice wine vinegar, aged sherry vinegar, or fresh lemon juice. I don't add mustard or other condiments, but I do season with salt and freshly ground pepper.



Epazote



Pineapple sage



Honeydew sage



Sage



Mediterranean bay



California bay

Creamy Herb Dressing

I've taken the basic ranch salad dressing one step further by incorporating a generous quantity of fresh herbs. Use a homemade mayonnaise if you like, but I find that Hellmann's works quite well here. *Yields about 2 cups, enough for 12 portions of salad.*

Parsley, dill, chives, and thyme blend with buttermilk for a creamy, tangy dressing perfect for a hardy lettuce salad.



- ¼ small bunch dill, stems removed (about ¼ cup loosely packed leaves)
- ¼ bunch flat-leaf parsley, stems removed (about ¾ cup loosely packed leaves)
- ¼ bunch thyme, stems removed (about 2 Tbs. loosely packed leaves)
- ½ bunch chives, coarsely chopped (⅓ cup)
- ¾ cup mayonnaise
- ½ cup buttermilk
- 2 Tbs. cider vinegar
- ½ tsp. coarse salt; more to taste
- ⅛ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- ¾ tsp. hot sauce

In a food processor, combine the dill, parsley, thyme, and chives with the mayonnaise; process until the herbs are chopped. With the motor running, slowly pour in the buttermilk and then add the vinegar, salt, pepper, and hot sauce. Taste and adjust seasoning. Pour into a bottle or jar and refrigerate for up to 2 weeks.

Herb Butter

I love the way a pat of herb butter enhances grilled seafood, chicken, or steak. Try adding it to rice, pasta, and soups. For the most flavor, mash in as much of the herbs as the butter will hold. Any tender herb is appropriate. Wrap the butter tightly in plastic so it doesn't absorb odors. *Yields 1 pound.*

- 1 lb. unsalted butter, cut into pieces and softened to room temperature
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- ¼ cup fresh lemon juice
- 4 cups assorted fresh tender herb leaves (choose from tarragon, thyme, parsley, basil, dill, chives, marjoram, chervil)

In a food processor, combine the butter, salt, and pepper. Process until you get a creamy paste, scraping down the sides as necessary, and then add the lemon juice and process until creamy. Add the herb leaves and process again until well blended. Shape into 2 logs in parchment or waxed paper, roll tightly, wrap well in plastic, and chill (or freeze for up to 3 months). Cut off a slice and lay it on the hot food just before serving.

Kaffir lime leaves:

◆ Add several fresh kaffir lime leaves (loved by Thai cooks for their strong lemony aroma) to white rice at the start of cooking and enjoy the heavenly perfume when you lift the lid.

Epazote:

◆ Add epazote to a Mexican dish like black beans; you'll find its turpentine-like flavor (trust me, it grows on you) cuts the heaviness of the beans and helps counteract flatulence.

Lemon thyme:

(very strong, so use sparingly)
◆ Try lemon thyme with salmon, tuna, or sea bass, or in seafood stews.
◆ Make a marinade with chopped lemon thyme, shallots, olive oil, and lemon juice for grilled chicken.

Lemon verbena:

◆ Make a lemon verbena butter to top broiled shrimp, scallops,

Venture into lesser-known herbs

If you're lucky enough to encounter these unusual herbs, buy a small bunch and take a cue from my suggestions below, which are designed to take a fairly simple and familiar dish and add a new herb for a slightly exotic twist.

or mild-tasting fish like red snapper, sea bass, or grouper.

- ◆ Flavor iced tea with lemon verbena and lime.
- ◆ Crush a few leaves and put them in a steamer basket with chicken or fish for a lightly perfumed dish.

Lovage:

(has an intense

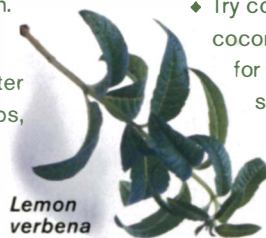
celery-like taste; use sparingly)

- ◆ Add chopped lovage to a garlic and white-wine sauce for steamed clams, or to a white-wine and shallot sauce for steamed mussels.
- ◆ Add lovage leaves to a simmering tomato sauce for pasta or for baking with eggplant-filled cannelloni.

Thai basil:

(has a strong anise flavor)

- ◆ Try combining Thai basil with coconut milk and lemongrass for chicken or shellfish sauces.



Lemon verbena



When a pat of herb butter melts onto hot salmon, there's no need to make a sauce.

Aliza Green co-wrote Georges Perrier: Le Bec-Fin Recipes (Running Press). Her next book, an authoritative guide to legume cookery, is due out next spring. ◆

Paella

Rice At Its Best

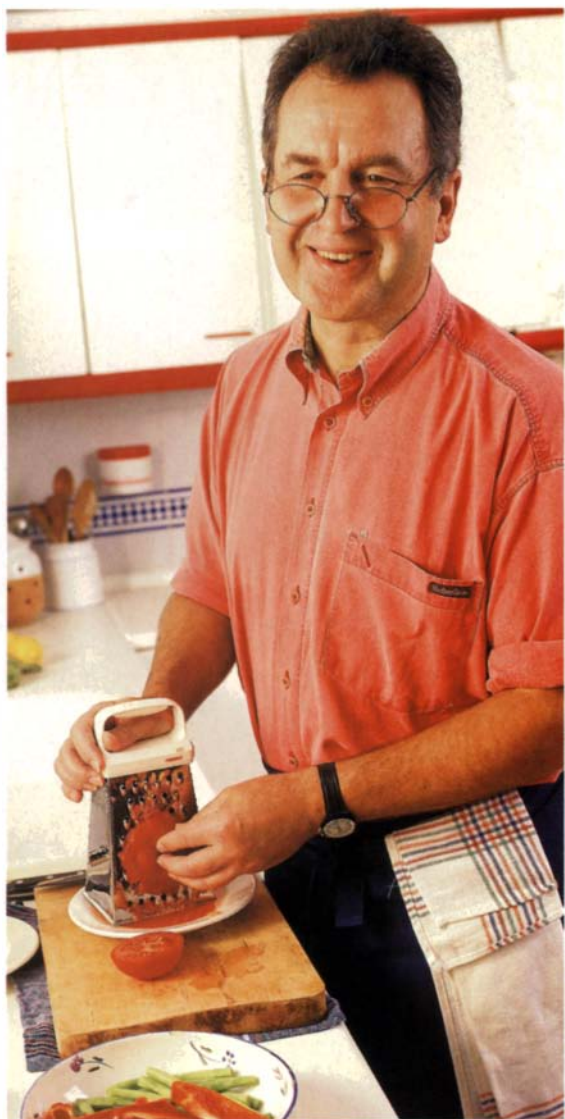


Paella tastes best straight from the pan, where a golden crust of rice awaits your happy discovery.

Authentic *arroz en paella* calls for the right pan and a thin blanket of rice

BY NORBERTO JORGE

Every country has a dish that unites its people. Or, just as often, divides them. In Spain, that dish is paella. Get us talking about our paellas, or *arroces*, as they are often called, and you may get the sense that there are more paella recipes than there are stars in the sky. And to a certain extent, you'd be right—the combinations of foods that can make up paella are endless. But the best paellas aren't merely the product of a good recipe, though that certainly helps. No, paella perfection comes about when the



Norberto Jorge uses a box grater to purée tomato for the *sofrito*, paella's flavor base.

person who is cooking it has an almost tangible affection for the dish itself, for the process of making it, and for the people who will be eating it.

I'll pass along a handful of paella traditions here in the hope that some of my own passion for the dish rubs off on you, but mostly what I'm doing is laying a foundation of techniques that you can apply to any paella (pah-AY-yah) recipe you come across or invent.

Paella isn't difficult to make, but it's amazing how often it gets bungled in restaurants (not my own, of

course). The most common offense is to load up the pan with excessive ingredients. These overwrought rice dishes—I can't even bear to call them paellas—may look impressive on the table but more often than not, they disappoint the palate. Why? Because they suffer from the fatal flaw of many paellas: their rice has been smothered. Meat, seafood, and vegetables justify their place in the pan as flavor lenders for the single most important ingredient of every paella: the rice. Remember that fact and you're well on your way. You'll know you've done it right when you and your friends are pushing aside the chicken, the green beans, even the artichokes, just to get another forkful of that scrumptiously addictive rice.

Great paella rests on five pillars

From my mother, Carmen, I've learned how to make paella by simply following my intuition. However, the scholar in me seeks hard data, so I've come up with five principle elements that determine the nature of the paella. They are: the rice, the pan, the distribution of heat, the *sofrito*, and the liquid.

The rice should be medium grain. Spanish rice is rounded and short; it absorbs liquid very well, and it stays relatively firm during cooking. Those qualities make it ideal for paella, where the rice grains absorb flavor from the liquid; the rice should be dry and separate when done, not creamy like risotto. The most appreciated variety of Spanish rice is *bomba*, which can be ordered by mail in the U.S. (see Sources, p. 76), but you'll also have success with the widely available medium-grain rice sold by Goya. Arborio is an acceptable substitute; long-grain rices, however, are not.

A true paella pan is wide, round, and shallow and has splayed sides. It has two looped handles and may dip slightly in the middle so the oil can pool there for the preliminary sautéing. The shape of the pan, which is called either a paella or paellera (pah-ay-YAIR-ah), helps to ensure that the rice cooks in a thin layer. The Valencians say that the cooked rice should be only as thick as *un ditet*, or the width of a small finger (about ½ inch). The key is to maximize the amount of rice touching the bottom of the pan because, as you'll see, that's where the flavor lives. For that reason, paella pans grow in diameter rather than in height. A 14-inch paella pan with *un ditet* of rice serves two to four people; an 18-inch pan serves six to eight.

A good paella pan is made of a very thin, conductive metal, usually plain or enameled steel. I've re-



For both color and flavor, steep toasted saffron threads in a small amount of stock.

Sauté everything consecutively in the paella pan

1 Start by sautéing the chicken until golden. A head of garlic goes in the pan, too. The foil packet on the pot in the background contains saffron threads, which are “toasted” by the heat of the simmering stock.



2 Sauté strips of red pepper until completely limp and tender, setting them aside to cool before peeling. The head of garlic stays in the pan.



3 Sauté the green beans and artichoke together while the peppers are cooling.

4 Push the vegetables to the perimeter of the pan to make way for the tomato, onion, and garlic sofrito.



cently seen quite a few objects masquerading as paella pans. For example, those beautiful heavy and expensive copper or stainless-steel pans that some stores market as paella pans are actually better suited to braising than to making paella. And any pan that's sold with a lid is a dead-giveaway impostor: except for the final resting period, paella is cooked uncovered.

If you don't have a paella pan (they're quite affordable—see Sources, p. 76), the alternative is to use a skillet. A 13-inch or larger stainless-steel or aluminum skillet will work; otherwise, use two medium skillets (which is a little trickier logistically), dividing the ingredients between them. Avoid cast-iron skillets (they retain too much heat) and nonstick pans (they produce bland paellas).

Try to find a heat source that can accommodate the whole paella pan. Depending on the configuration of your burners, you'll need to straddle the pan

over two burners or set it on your largest burner. Either way, you'll have to move and rotate the pan to distribute the heat. Or you can cook the paella outdoors on a large gas or charcoal grill, or even over a wood fire, which is how it's done at paella competitions in Spain (an annual ritual in many villages).

A sauté of aromatics, called the *sofrito*, provides the flavor base. The components of the *sofrito* vary by region. In the recipe here, I'm using tomato, onion, and garlic. Some cooks use paprika, herbs, or a dried sweet red pepper called *ñora*. The technique is simple: sauté the vegetables over medium heat until they soften and the flavors meld, and the water from the tomato has evaporated. This mixture should be thick enough to hold its shape in a spoon.

A flavorful liquid cooks the rice, while imbuing it with additional character. If you don't have a homemade stock on hand, improvise one with the in-

gredients in the paella. For paella with shrimp, for example, simmer the shells in salted water for a quick, flavorful stock. If you use canned stock, choose a low-salt one. You can also use water, as many home cooks do in Spain. Almost every paella recipe calls for the liquid to be infused with saffron, which contributes color as well as a subtle background flavor to the rice.

Tradition aside, you're allowed to be creative

Purists will tell you that the original Valencian paella contained chicken or rabbit, green beans, snails, and fresh lima beans, and that any other combination is correctly called *arroz en paella* (rice in a paella pan). These semantic distinctions don't interest me. I think



that if the combination of ingredients works and you stay true to the five principles above, it's paella.

Once you're comfortable with the technique of making paella, you can devise your own recipe according to what's good and fresh in your market. For some of my favorite combinations, see the sidebar at right. Here are a few more tips to help you reach the pinnacle of paella greatness:

The preliminary sauté. If you want to simplify cleanup, sauté all the ingredients consecutively in the paella pan, but if you want to hurry things along, you can use a few pans simultaneously (brown the chicken in the paella pan while the artichokes and green beans are cooking in a skillet, for example). All the sautéing, including the *sofrito*, can be done up to several hours in advance.

Adding the liquid. When you add the stock to the pan, it should boil briskly for the first several

minutes, until the rice starts to peek above the surface. Then you'll lower the heat so the liquid simmers gently. During this entire time, move the pan around as much as you want to even out the heat, but don't stir the rice. If the liquid seems to be boiling off too quickly, you may need to add a little more, so have some hot water or more stock handy on another burner.

Gauging doneness. The rice should be *al dente*, not mushy—break apart a grain and you'll see a pin-size white dot in the center. This should take about 20 minutes. If the pan has been set over two burners, I find that it's helpful to cover the pan with foil for the last two minutes of cooking just to be sure the rice cooks evenly. Another solution is to put the paella pan, uncovered, in a heated 425°F oven for the last 10 minutes of cooking.

Getting the *socarrat*. *Socarrat* (soh-kah-RAHT, from the verb *socarrar*, which means to toast lightly) is the caramelized crust of rice that sometimes sticks to the bottom of the pan. It is the prize in a well-made paella. To get some, increase the heat at the end of cooking, paying close attention to the sound of the rice (it crackles) and the smell (toasty but not burned). After one or two minutes, poke under the foil with a spoon; if you feel just a *touch* of bumpy resistance on the bottom of the pan, you've got *socarrat*.

The resting period. When the liquid is absorbed, the rice is done, and the *socarrat* achieved, the paella needs some time alone to finish cooking and round out its flavors. Cover the pan with a clean towel or foil (if you haven't already done so) and let it rest off the heat for five to ten minutes.

Serving. Traditionally, paella is eaten directly from the pan. Everyone finds a place around the pan (a circular or square table is ideal) and starts eating from the perimeter of the pan and working toward the center. If this communal style doesn't appeal to you, let people spoon the paella onto their own plates.

As a preface to the paella, I like to offer a mixture of grilled onions, tomatoes, and peppers, called *escalibada*, on toasted bread. To accompany the rice, you need nothing more than lemon wedges, a lightly dressed salad, wine, and lots of family and friends. *(Recipe follows)*

More paella, por favor

There's no limit to the ingredients that can be used in a paella. Seafood, ham, vegetables, fruits, nuts—they've all found their way into the paella pan. Here are some combinations that give the rice a wonderful flavor. The technique is always the same, as described on pp. 48–51: sauté the ingredients, make the *sofrito*, stir in the rice, and add the saffron-infused liquid.

Seafood paella. Sauté very briefly shrimp, scallops, and calamari (cut in rings), returning the seafood to the rice toward the end of cooking. Bury scrubbed clams or mussels in the broth while the rice cooks. Serve with *alioli* (the Spanish version of aioli): smash garlic and salt to a paste in a mortar and add olive oil and lemon juice to taste.

Vegetable paella. Sauté green peppers, green beans, cauliflower, and artichokes; make a *sofrito* of tomato and parsley. Add shelled fava beans with the rice.

Sausage and chickpea paella. Try using chorizo sausage, red peppers, a whole head of garlic, and cooked chickpeas (use the chickpea cooking liquid for stock, or combine it with a meat stock). Make a *sofrito* of garlic, tomato, and paprika and add the chickpeas with the rice.

Cook the rice *al dente*, and then gently toast the bottom

Add the rice to the pan, and sauté for a minute or two until translucent.



Add simmering stock. Arrange the chicken and vegetables in the pan and cook the rice until *al dente*.

Cover with foil, turn up the heat, and use a spoon to check for a caramelized crust.



RECIPE

Paella

If you don't have a paella pan, use a 13-inch or larger skillet, or divide the ingredients between two medium skillets. Stainless-steel or anodized-aluminum skillets work best. Don't use cast iron or nonstick. *Serves four.*

3½ cups homemade or low-salt canned chicken stock; more as needed

Pinch of saffron (8 to 10 threads)

Salt to taste

About ¼ cup olive oil; more if needed

4 skinless chicken thighs, chopped in half and seasoned with salt and pepper

1 small head garlic (remove excess papery skins, trim the top, and make a shallow cut around its equator to speed cooking), plus 4 cloves garlic, thinly sliced

1 medium red bell pepper, cored, seeded, and cut into 1-inch wide strips

3 artichokes

3 oz. green beans (about 16), trimmed

1 small onion, grated on the largest holes of a box grater

1 ripe tomato, halved horizontally and grated on the largest holes of a box grater (discard the skin)

1½ cups medium-grain rice

1 sprig fresh rosemary

2 lemons, cut in wedges for garnish

In a saucepan, bring the stock to a boil; reduce the heat to a simmer and cover. Put the saffron on a 3-inch-wide strip of aluminum foil, fold up the foil to make a

square packet, and set the foil directly on the lid of the simmering stock for about 15 min. Unfold the packet, transfer the saffron to a mortar (or a small bowl), add a pinch of salt, and use the pestle (or the back of spoon) to crush the saffron. Add about ½ cup of the hot stock to the saffron and let the saffron steep for about 15 min. Add the saffron-infused liquid back to the stock. Taste; the stock should be well-seasoned, so add more salt if necessary. Remove from the heat until ready to add to the rice.

Set a 14-inch paella pan over medium-high heat and add the olive oil. When the oil is hot, add the chicken and the head of garlic; sauté until the chicken is golden, 10 to 15 min. The oil may splatter, and you may need to turn down the heat. Transfer the partially cooked chicken to a platter. The head of garlic stays in the pan.

Reduce the heat to medium low. In the same pan, sauté the red pepper slices slowly until they're very limp, 20 to 25 min., adding more oil if necessary. They shouldn't brown too much. Meanwhile, prepare the artichokes. Cut off the upper two-thirds of the leaves and the stem. Pare away the remaining tough outer leaves. Scrape out the choke fibers and cut the hearts into quarters (or eighths, if large).

When the pepper is done, transfer the pieces to a plate, cover with foil, and set aside. Slowly sauté the artichokes and green beans in the same pan, still on medium low, until the artichokes are golden and tender and the beans are soft and slightly wrinkled, 15 to 25 min. Meanwhile, when the pepper pieces are cool



If it looks like this, you win.

Perfect paellas yield *socarrat*, a seductive caramelization of the bottom layer of rice.

enough to handle, peel off and discard the skin. When the artichokes and green beans are done, push them to the perimeter of the pan where there's less heat (or transfer them to the platter with the chicken.)

If there's more than 1 Tbs. of oil in the pan, pour out the excess. Increase the heat to medium and sauté the grated onion and sliced garlic until the onion is soft (it's all right if it gets slightly brown), about 5 min. Add the grated tomato. Season well with salt and sauté until the water from the tomato has cooked out and the mixture, called a *sofrito*, has darkened to a burgundy color and is a very thick purée, 5 to 10 min. If you're not cooking the rice immediately, remove the pan from the heat.

About a half hour before you're ready to eat, bring the stock back to a simmer and set the pan with the *sofrito* over your largest burner (or over two burners) on medium heat, noticing if the pan sits level. (If not, choose another burner or try to create a level surface.) When the *sofrito* is hot, add the rice, stirring until it's translucent, 1 to 2 min.

Spread out the rice (it should just blanket the bottom of the pan), distribute the green beans and artichokes evenly, and arrange the chicken in the pan. Increase the heat to medium high and pour in 3 cups of the simmering stock (reserving ½ cup). As the stock comes to a boil, lay the peppers in the pan, starburst-like, and push the head of garlic to the center. Cook until the rice begins to appear above the liquid, 6 to 8 min., rotating the pan over one and two burners as necessary to distribute the heat to all areas. Add the sprig of rosemary and reduce the heat to medium low. Continue to simmer, rotating the pan as necessary, until the liquid has been absorbed and the rice is *al dente*, 8 to 10 min. more. To check for doneness, taste a grain just below the top layer of rice—there should be a very tiny white dot in the center. If the liquid is absorbed but the rice is not done, add a bit more hot stock or water to the pan and cook a few minutes more. Cover the pan with foil and cook gently for another 2 min., which will help to ensure that the top layer of rice is evenly cooked. With the foil still in place, increase the heat to medium high and, turning

the pan, cook until the bottom layer of rice starts to caramelize, creating the *socarrat*, 1 to 2 min. You may hear the rice crackling, which is fine, but if it starts burning, remove the pan from the heat immediately. To check for *socarrat*, peel back the foil and use a spoon to feel for a slight crust on the bottom of the pan.

Remove the pan from the heat and let the paella rest, still covered, 5 to 10 min. Sit everyone down at a round or square table, if possible. Remove the foil, and invite people to eat directly from the pan, starting at the perimeter and working toward the center, squeezing lemon over their section if they want.



Norberto Jorge, who grew up in Alicante, Spain, is the chef-owner of two restaurants that specialize in paella, one in Madrid and the other in Oslo, Norway. ♦

Mind your borders—some people like lemon, others don't.



wine choices

Lusty Spanish wines will match paella's big flavors

Gather the gang 'round the paella pan, dig into Spain's most famous dish, and "drink local": Spanish wine is one of the wine world's secret treasures. The flavors will wake up the most jaded palate, the quality is high, and the prices are unbeatable.

With most paella recipes, you have many options: just fine-tune your choices accord-

ing to what you add to the pan. With lighter fare like seafood, keep the party mood going with *cava*, Spain's answer to Champagne; try Castellblanch Brut Zero or Segura Viudas' Aria Brut. For still wine, look to dry whites with crisp, dry, apple-and-apricot-fruity acidity. I like Albariño (Burgans makes a fine one).

Spain's best-known red,

Rioja (from the region of the same name), made from the tempranillo grape, is a great choice for a paella with sausage and red meat. It will also highlight the big, rich flavor of rosemary, caramelized onion, and browned chicken in the recipe here. Bodegas Montecillo and Conde de Valdemar are reliable producers.

Can't decide between red

and white? Strike a happy medium with rosé (*rosado* in Spanish). Spain makes some of the best. Try Señorío de Sarria (Navarra), Marqués de Cáceres (Rioja), or Jaime Serra Tempranillo (Penedès).

Rosina Tinari Wilson teaches and writes about food and wine pairing in the San Francisco Bay area.

Chill, Don't Bake, for Creamy Icebox Cakes

A stint in the refrigerator sets the cake's filling and transforms cookies into cakelike layers

BY HEATHER HO



A cool way to bake. The filling for this ginger-mascarpone cake firms up after a 24-hour chill.



Icebox cakes, cool layers of creamy filling sandwiched between cookies—or, in some recipes, cake—are a slice of nostalgia. Around since the invention of the refrigerator, these desserts include everything from a sophisticated charlotte russe (a mold neatly lined with sponge cake and filled with Bavarian cream) to Nabisco's Famous Wafer Roll (chocolate wafer cookies spread with whipped cream and laid out into a log). What both of these have in common is that they're not baked: the filling sets in the refrigerator, and the cake is served cold, which makes icebox cakes great make-ahead desserts.

Cookies—crumbs or whole—set the stage

Though leftover cake is often used for icebox cakes, I prefer to use cookies. After time spent in the fridge topped by a creamy filling, the cookies—whether whole or made into crumbs—soften into a wonderful cakelike texture. When I developed the lemon-caramel cake for my dessert menu, I made my own graham crackers. But making your own cookies at home, while admirable, is a step you can leave out since store-bought ones work well (think cheesecake). In fact, for the chocolate wafer icebox cake, I found that the classic Nabisco wafers—perfectly thin, machine-made rounds—actually work better than the homemade wafers I tried.

Give the cake shape with a mold

At the restaurant, I made the lemon-caramel cake as individual servings using a round metal mold. A springform pan allows you to do the same on a larger scale; the outside ring pops off to reveal the many layers of this showstopper of a cake. For the chocolate wafer icebox cake, I use a loaf pan. This shape not only makes it easier to line up the cookies (see the photos at right), but it also makes for very dramatic slices. But because the sides of the pan aren't removable, you should line the pan with plastic wrap, which will enable you to unmold the cake after it has set.

Pat down the crumbs to make an even layer. For the cakes that use cookie crumbs—easily ground in the food processor or crushed with a rolling pin—be sure to pat the crumbs down in an even layer. The best tool here is your hands.

Use a spatula to distribute the filling over the crumbs, being careful not to pile it all in one place. If you have to spread it too much, you'll pull up some of the crumb layer. A few crumbs mixed into the filling aren't the end of the world, but too many take away from the distinct look of the layers.

Chill, slice carefully, and serve

Though these cakes look grand, they're not difficult to make. In fact, the longest part of the process is the chilling. The cakes need at least a day for the filling to set and for the cookies to soften.



Line up the cookies in slightly overlapping rows. Gently squeeze the cookies together as you go to bring the bottom layer of whipped cream up between them.



Spread the remaining coffee cream over and in between the cookies. Gently press down with the spatula to be sure the cream is filling any hard-to-reach pockets.

Two of the cakes set up in the fridge, but I always freeze the lemon-caramel cake so that the lemon mousse doesn't melt when the meringue topping is browned under the broiler later. You want to slice this one while it's still quite firm; that way, the layers will stay perfectly intact. It tastes great slightly frozen, so go ahead and serve it on the hard side. If you'd like it softer—more cold than frozen—slice the cake, plate it, wait a bit, and then serve. The refrigerated cakes should be sliced just out of the cold for best results.

A warm knife makes a clean slice. Icebox cakes can be a challenge to slice neatly. For best results, warm the knife under hot water and dry it off. Make a slice, clean the knife, and warm it again for the next slice.

RECIPES

Ginger-Mascarpone Icebox Cake

Delicious on its own, this cake is also lovely paired with some bright-flavored fruit, such as blueberries or slices of mango or peach. *Serves twelve.*

- 12 oz. gingersnap crumbs, about 2¼ cups (from about 40 Nabisco brand cookies)**
- 2½ oz. (5 Tbs.) unsalted butter, melted**
- 8 oz. cream cheese, at room temperature**
- ½ cup plain low-fat yogurt**
- ¾ cup sugar; more for the pan**
- ½ tsp. vanilla extract**
- ½ cup minced candied (crystallized) ginger**
- 1 lb. mascarpone cheese**
- ⅓ cup heavy cream**

Spray a 9-inch springform pan with nonstick cooking spray or grease it lightly. Dust the pan with a little sugar and knock out any excess. Combine the gingersnap crumbs and butter, rubbing them together with your fingertips to combine thoroughly. Sprinkle half of the crumbs over the bottom of the pan and pat down evenly; reserve the rest. With an electric mixer, whip together the cream cheese, yogurt, sugar, vanilla, and candied ginger until smooth, scraping down the sides. Add the mascarpone and cream and whip until the mixture is thoroughly combined and just holds peaks. Don't overwhip or the mixture may separate. Carefully



spoon half of the mascarpone cream over the gingersnap crust, spreading it evenly to the edges of the pan. Sprinkle half of the remaining crumbs over the mascarpone cream in the pan. Top with remaining mascarpone cream and finish with the remaining crumbs. Gently tap the pan on the counter to eliminate any air bubbles. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate overnight.

Coffee & Cream Icebox Cake

Coffee and hazelnuts give this cake—a variation on Nabisco's Famous Wafer Roll recipe—a more sophisticated flavor. To be safe, buy two boxes of cookies, as some may break. This cake slices best after 2 days in the refrigerator. *Serves eight.*

- 1¾ cups heavy cream**
- 1 Tbs. instant espresso powder**
- 1 Tbs. sugar**
- 44 Nabisco Famous Chocolate Wafers**
- ¼ cup finely chopped, toasted hazelnuts for garnish**
- ¼ cup crushed chocolate wafer cookie crumbs**

Lightly grease a 6-cup loaf pan. Line the pan with two pieces of overlapping plastic wrap, allowing the excess to hang over the edges of the pan.

In a bowl, combine the cream, espresso powder,

Dramatic slices from a homely loaf. This chocolate cake doesn't look like much while whole, but the slices reveal what looks like eleven layers of cake—actually cookies softened by the coffee-flavored whipped cream filling.

and sugar. Whisk until the cream holds firm peaks. Spoon about two-thirds of the whipped cream into the prepared pan. Tap the pan firmly on the counter to even the cream and eliminate any air bubbles.

Starting at a short side of the pan, arrange 11 cookies in the cream, standing them on their edge in a row like dominoes. Gently squeeze the cookies together as you go. Do the same with a second row of cookies, slightly overlapping the cookies from the second row with the cookies in the first row (see photos on p. 53). Continue with two more rows for a total of four rows.

Press down on the cookies gently. Cover them with the remaining cream. Smooth the cream with a spatula, gently pressing to make sure any gaps between the cookies are filled. Tap the pan on the counter several times to eliminate any air pockets.

Cover the cake with the excess plastic wrap and refrigerate at least 24 hours, preferably 2 days. When ready to serve, peel the plastic wrap from the top and gently tug on the plastic to loosen the cake from the sides of the pan. Set a cutting board on top of the pan and invert the cake onto the board. Lift the pan off and gently peel away the plastic wrap. Mix the hazelnuts with the cookie crumbs and sprinkle over the top of the cake. Slice carefully with a warm knife.

Lemon-Caramel Icebox Cake

The caramel and the lemon curd can be made ahead and refrigerated for up to 5 days. The caramel needs to be warmed to a pourable consistency before using. *Serves twelve.*

FOR THE LEMON CURD:

- 4 large eggs
- 4 large egg yolks (reserve the whites from 2 of the eggs for the meringue topping)
- 3 Tbs. finely grated lemon zest (from about 3 lemons)
- ½ cup sugar
- ⅔ cup fresh lemon juice
- 5 oz. (10 Tbs.) unsalted butter, cut in pieces

FOR THE CARAMEL:

- ¾ cup sugar
- 2 Tbs. light corn syrup
- ¼ cup water
- ¼ cup plus 2 Tbs. heavy cream
- ¼ tsp. vanilla extract



This cake looks complex, but it's easy to make in stages. The tartness of the lemon curd is countered by a surprise layer of caramel sauce, made pleasantly chewy by the cold.

FOR ASSEMBLY:

- 5 oz. (about 1½ cups) graham cracker crumbs (from about 10 crackers), lightly toasted in a 350°F oven until they just take on some color, about 7 min.
- 2 oz. (4 Tbs.) unsalted butter, melted
- 1½ cups heavy cream
- 2 egg whites
- 5 Tbs. sugar; more for the pan

To make the lemon curd—Bring a medium pot filled half way with water to a simmer. In a medium stainless-steel bowl that fits over the pot without touching the water, whisk the eggs, yolks, zest, sugar, and lemon juice. Put the bowl over (not touching) the simmering water and whisk until the mixture thickens and becomes smooth and custard-like, about 10 min.; remove from the heat. Whisk in the butter a piece at a time. Strain the curd through a fine mesh into a bowl. Put plastic wrap directly on its surface and refrigerate.

To make the caramel—In a medium, heavy-based saucepan, combine the sugar, corn syrup, and water; stir until the sugar dissolves. Cook over high heat until the mixture turns dark amber. Don't stir the caramel while it cooks; instead, swirl the pan gently to get an even color. Remove from the heat and whisk in the cream (be careful: it will splatter). Return the mixture to the heat, whisk until smooth, and then whisk in the vanilla. Let cool to room temperature.

To assemble the cake—Spray a 9-inch springform pan with nonstick cooking spray or grease it lightly. Dust the pan with sugar and knock out any excess. Combine the toasted graham cracker crumbs and butter, rubbing them together with your fingertips to combine thoroughly. Sprinkle half of the crumbs over the bottom of the pan and pat down; reserve the rest.

In a large bowl, whisk the cream to firm peaks. Fold in the cooled lemon curd. Spoon half of the lemon cream over the cracker crust and spread it evenly to the edges of the pan. Sprinkle the remaining crumbs over the lemon cream. Spread the remaining lemon cream over the crumbs. Pour a little more than half of the caramel over the lemon cream, reserving the rest in the refrigerator. Put the cake in the freezer while you make the meringue topping.

Whisk the egg whites and sugar in a double boiler over medium-high heat (as you did with the lemon curd) and cook until the mixture is warm and the sugar is dissolved, about 2 min. With an electric mixer, whisk the whites to stiff peaks. Spread the meringue on the top of the cake. Freeze the cake, unwrapped, overnight. (For longer storage, wrap it in plastic once the meringue has firmed up; unwrap before defrosting.)

About an hour before serving, transfer the cake to the refrigerator. Just before serving, reheat the remaining caramel sauce if you want to drizzle some on the plate. Brown the meringue by running it under a hot broiler, rotating the cake if necessary, until evenly browned (or brown it with a propane torch). Run a thin knife around the sides of the cake and remove the springform. Cut the cake into slices with a warm knife. If the cake seems very frozen, let the slices soften somewhat before serving. Serve with a drizzle of warm caramel sauce.

Heather Ho is a pastry chef at Boulevard restaurant in San Francisco. ♦

Rolling Pin Roundup



Ball-bearing pin



French pin

Once while tackling my great-grandmother Kate's legendary strudel, I decided to use the tapered rolling pin I'd inherited from her instead of my own ball-bearing pin. I discovered that instead of rolling the dough out into a square, as my ball-bearing pin naturally did, the thicker middle section of the tapered pin pushed the dough into a circle, which is exactly what I wanted. This episode made me realize that even with a tool as seemingly simple as a rolling pin, design is the key to performance.

The basic two:

the rolling pin and the French pin

Rolling pins come in two types: the rolling or ball-bearing pin and the French pin.

A **rolling pin** has a cylindrical barrel that spins around a shaft flanked by two handles. Pressure to the dough is supplied by the weight of the pin and by

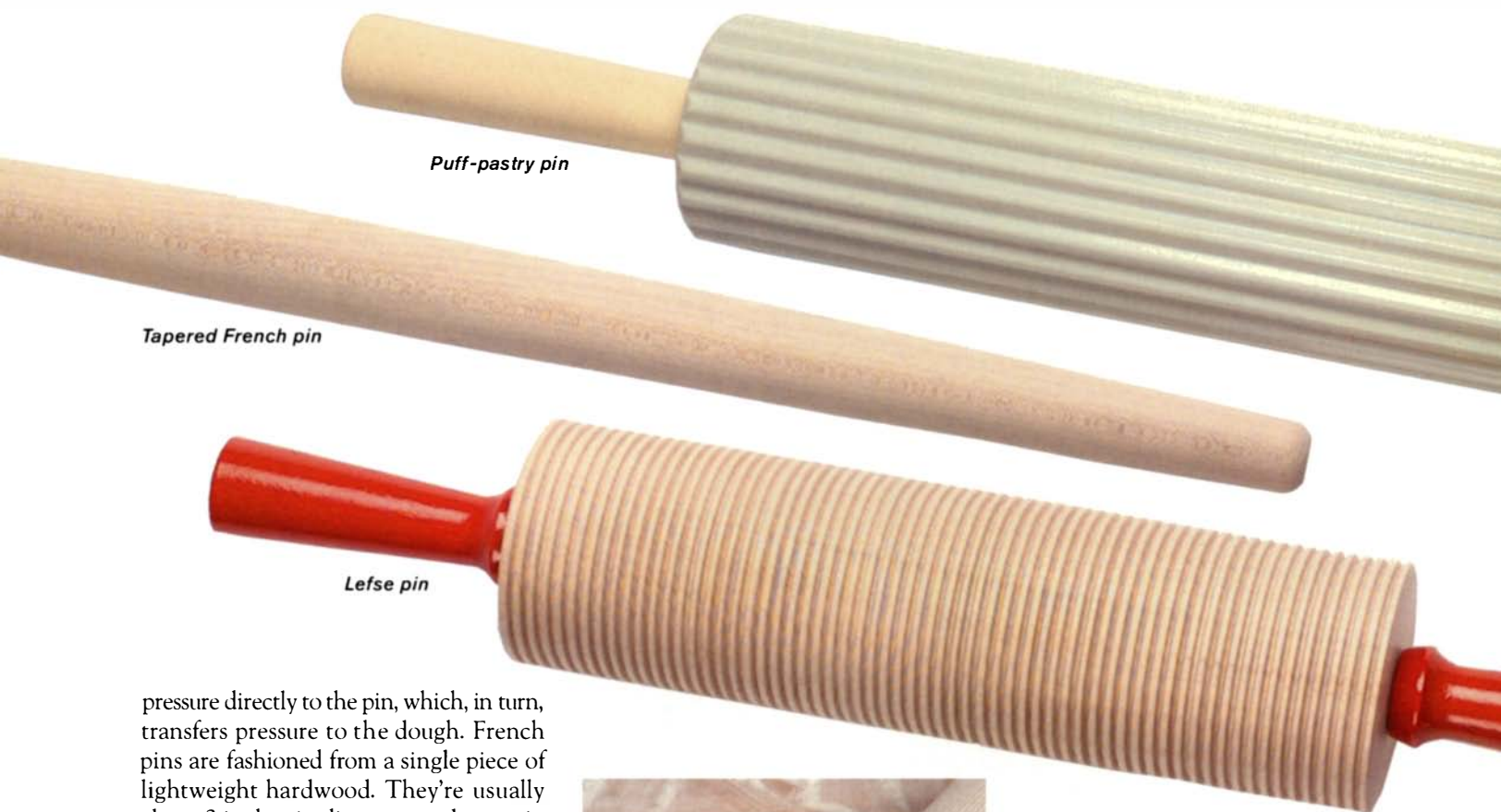
the baker's arms, not the baker's hands. The barrel diameter varies from about 2½ inches for a good-quality household-type (\$20 to \$25) to 3½ inches for a heavy-duty professional-size (\$50 to \$60). A good-quality ball-bearing pin is made from hardwood, inside of which is a steel shaft capped at either end with sealed ball bearings for the smoothest rolling action.

Professional-weight ball-bearing pins with 15-inch barrels are great for swiftly and easily rolling out very large dough pieces, while lighter 10-inch pins are easier for smaller tasks. Professional-weight ball-bearing pins are available in 12- to 18-inch lengths, so a good compromise might be to buy a 15-inch pin and keep a longer French pin on hand.

A **French pin** is a solid wooden cylinder that's more slender and lighter than a ball-bearing pin. Here, your hands apply

The basic two work well for most tasks, but for specialty baking, look for a customized tool

BY MAGGIE GLEZER



pressure directly to the pin, which, in turn, transfers pressure to the dough. French pins are fashioned from a single piece of lightweight hardwood. They're usually about 2 inches in diameter and come in 15- and 20-inch lengths (about \$15).

The right pin for the job

Both ball-bearing and French pins have their ardent adherents, and I've discovered that the preference often seems to depend on the type of baking you do and how much training you've had.

Ball-bearing pins are the choice of bread bakers, like me, who often roll out resilient, sweet yeast-type doughs such as for Danish or croissants, or who roll large quantities of dough, where we like the muscle transfer you get with the long, heavy-duty rolling pins. French pins are the choice of pastry bakers, who primarily roll out smaller amounts of soft, high-fat-content doughs such as for tarts and cookies, especially if those bakers have had some training in how to use one.

French pins allow closer contact with the dough, and they do more than just roll out dough. Flo Braker, author of *The Simple Art of Perfect Baking* (Chapters) says, "Since you can't roll with your arm, the French pin is really the next best thing." She loves how the French pin allows her to control the pressure she applies when rolling out cookie dough, and she uses it as a baton to "tap, not whack" hard, chilled puff pastry dough to soften it for rolling. To move disks of



A rolling pin cover slips right over the pin; flour the cover to make it "nonstick."

dough around on the work surface or to transfer them to the refrigerator, she likes to flour the dough lightly and then drape it around the pin.

Abigail Johnson Dodge, *Fine Cooking's* test kitchen director and the author of *Great Fruit Desserts* (Rizzoli), wouldn't dream of using anything but a French pin. "I feel that I'm more in touch with the dough," she says. "I get a better sense of whether I'm rolling with even pressure."

While Marion Cunningham, author of *The Fanny Farmer Baking Book* (Knopf), concedes that French pins are "maneuverable if you know how to handle them,"

she thinks they're not as accessible for nonprofessionals. "You have to learn a little more to use the French pin; it's trickier. With the heavier rolling pin, it's black and white: you just take the handles and go back and forth." Also, the pin's heavy weight helps reduce the amount of rolling needed. She finds that with French pins, inexperienced bakers tend to "roll more, which toughens the dough." And Flo Braker does use a heavy-duty ball-bearing pin for tackling very large, buttery doughs, especially when it's important to work fast to prevent butter melt-out. She especially likes the ball-bearing pin's ability to roll croissant dough into a flat, smooth sheet in just a few strokes, "before it knows what's happening to it."

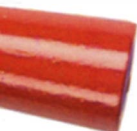
A knit cotton rolling pin cover is helpful for rolling pie crusts and cookie doughs, especially for beginners. You can flour the stocking to make it nonstick, and even if you flour it liberally, it won't add more flour to the dough itself. Rolling pin covers are inexpensive (around \$3 for a set of two); see Sources on p. 76.

Specialized pins

After the basic two, rolling pin designs become quite specialized.



Springerle pin



A **springerle pin** presses designs into springerle cookie dough.

A **tapered French pin**, like the one I inherited from my great-grandmother, is specifically for rolling rounds of dough; it's great for tart and pie crusts and costs about \$10. A tapered pin's bulging middle applies more pressure to the center of the dough, pushing it ahead of the sides, thus creating a circle as the dough is rolled and rotated. Chinese cooks use a small tapered pin to roll dough rounds for dumplings.

A **ficelle**, a thinner version of the French pin, is what I use to create deco-

rative designs in French breads. The pin is light, so it can smooth dough without flattening, like for an herb inlay for flatbread (see *Fine Cooking* #29, p. 65). I also like a ficelle for pressing cloverleaves, splits, and other decorative patterns in bread doughs. Ficelles can be hard to find, but a sanded dowel, about the diameter of a broom handle, works just as well.

Embossing pins, rolling types that incise patterns in dough, are some of the most beautiful pins you'll find. Scandinavian bakers use several different embossing pins while rolling out their famous flatbreads. Springerle pins, used to make the hard, dry cookies called springerle, can have flowers, animals, symbols, and even miniature scenes carved into the barrel. They start at \$15; more elaborate pins start at about \$60.

Beatrice Ojakangas, author of *Whole Grain Breads by Machine or Hand* (Macmillan), uses a Norwegian lefse pin; its grooves give lefse (a soft potato flatbread) a subtle texture and help roll out the dough very thin. Lefse pins run about \$20. Other common Scandinavian embossing pins are hobnailed with a small or large grid.

A **puff-pastry pin** is great for butter-laminated doughs such as puff pastry and Danish dough. Its crenellated barrel allows cold, hard butter to be evenly distributed without overworking the dough. Rose Levy Beranbaum, author of *The Pie & Pastry Bible* (Scribner) says, "You can make great puff pastry without one, but

Choosing and caring for pins

- ◆ When picking out a pin, roll it on a counter and examine it at eye level, to make sure that it isn't warped or nicked, advises Abby Dodge.
- ◆ To clean a rolling pin, just brush it off with a dry cloth, or use a damp sponge to wipe it off and then dry it thoroughly with a cloth. Rolling pins need no oiling at all. Never soak them in water, which causes warping and cracking.
- ◆ To keep a rolling pin from getting dings or nicks, Flo Braker advises suspending the pin horizontally from a rack, either on a free wall, under a counter, on a closet door, or even under a kitchen cart.

for the first few turns, it lets you work the butter in without pressing too hard." Pastry pins are pricey (about \$130).

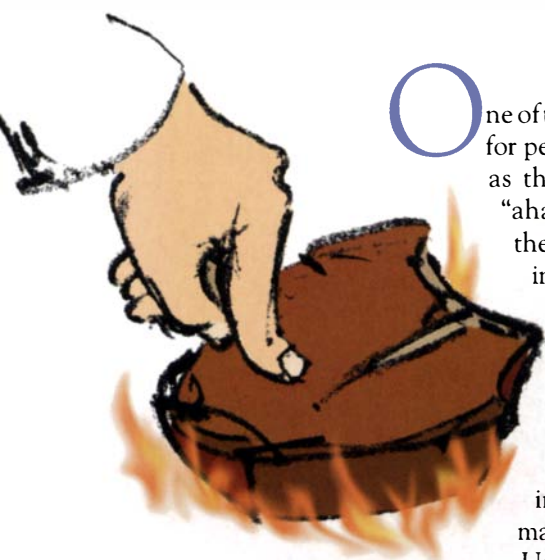
Rolling pins come in many materials—stainless steel, nonstick, and marble are just a few—but I think wood is best. Marble pins might keep pastry cooler, preventing butter from melting during handling, but they tend not to be as well constructed and are very heavy. Mine languishes in a drawer. Using a marble pastry board is a more practical way to harness marble's cooling properties.

Maggie Glezer has just finished a book about artisan breadmaking in America. ◆

How to Improve

For passionate cooks, the learning never stops. Here's a wealth of mini lessons from the country's top experts.

BY JOANNE McALLISTER SMART



Use your hands.
For most cooks, touch is an under-used sense.

One of the best things about cooking, at least for people who love the cooking as much as the eating, is that there are always “aha!” moments. Small revelations like these, whether they come from following a good recipe, watching a cooking demo, or reading these pages, can take your cooking to the next level of skill and success.

We asked our contributors—some of the best chefs and instructors around—for their most important cooking tips, the ones that make a good dish great.

Unfortunately, the piece of advice we heard most often is perhaps the hardest to follow. “Learn to trust yourself,” said the pros. “Have self-confidence.” Fortunately, they also offered plenty of practical suggestions that, when taken all together, will help you attain the skill that will give you the confidence to trust yourself.

Follow the recipe, but use your head—and all five senses

Abigail Johnson Dodge, cookbook author, instructor, and *Fine Cooking*'s test kitchen director, often fields calls from *Fine Cooking* readers who believe a recipe in the magazine didn't work. After some discussion, it usually turns out that they used a different size pan than called for, left out an important ingredient, or didn't measure as directed. “The biggest mistake people make is not following the recipe,” says Dodge, who recommends following a recipe exactly the first time. “Once you try it, and you know how it works and how it tastes, then you can change it.”

But even while you're giving the recipe the benefit of the doubt, you can't follow it blindly. “Remember that the most important part of the recipe is you,” says Katherine Alford, formerly the director of instruction at Peter Kump's Cooking School in New York City. “You have to use common sense.” This means striking a balance between using a

Twenty-three quick ways to hone your cooking skills

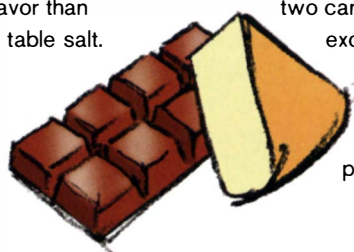
1 Prep your ingredients.

Having everything ready to roll before you actually start cooking will make you more efficient and your cooking more enjoyable.

2 Switch to coarse salt.

Kosher salt and sea salt have a much better flavor than ordinary table salt.

3 Start with the best ingredients you can find. Imported *parmigiano reggiano* is so much better than domestic Parmesan that the two can't even be compared; excellent chocolate makes all the difference in a cake; and a piece of beef graded USDA prime can't be beat.



4 Pay attention to how ingredients are measured. “One cup flour, sifted” is not the same as “one cup sifted flour.”

5 Buy a good chef's knife. Stop chopping garlic with a paring knife. Once you get used to a chef's knife (also called a French knife), its longer, wider blade will give you speed, control, and confidence.

Your Cooking

recipe as a guide and being a slave to it. To learn how to do that, keep reading.

Trust doneness tests over the timer's buzzer. When you try a recipe for the first time, look to those descriptive words you'll find in a good recipe—"bake until golden brown," "boil until reduced by half"—and don't be so concerned that the time it takes to reach the desired state is more or less than the time suggested by the recipe.

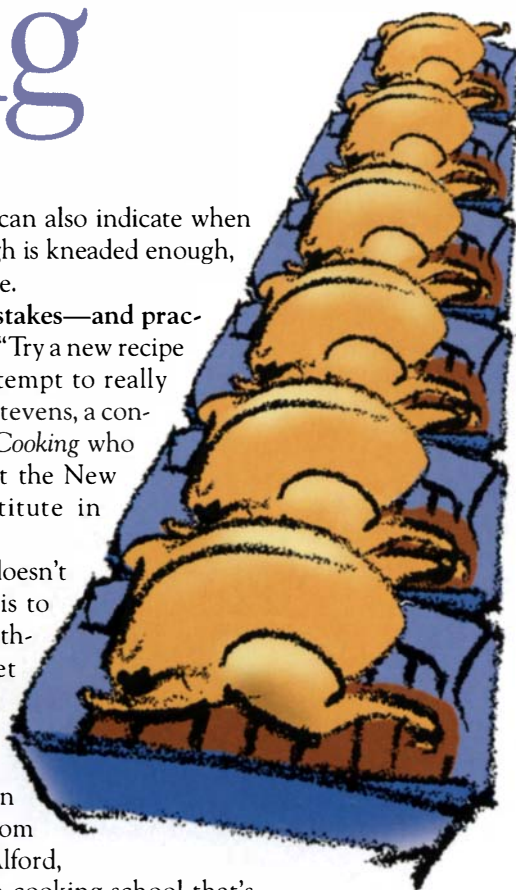
Use all your senses. Though taste ranks as the most important sense in cooking, learning to rely on your other senses makes you a more skillful cook. Your sense of smell—usually the first to detect that something is burning—is vital. You're always using your sense of sight, but you could probably look at things more closely: Is that caramel sauce really dark amber or still medium gold? Is the sabayon trailing ribbons behind the whisk, or just thin dribbles?

Hearing—good for gauging the sizzle in the pan or the sound of the brioche dough in the mixer—and touch are perhaps the most overlooked of the senses. Touch especially needs to be employed more by home cooks. When you see professional chefs poking at steaks with their fingers, it isn't an affectation; hands are extremely sensitive and sophisticated cooking tools. You can develop this sense of touch by paying attention to how different foods feel at different degrees of doneness, even as you're checking them with a thermometer, a toothpick, or a knife. Meat, for example, goes from being very soft when it's rare to quite firm

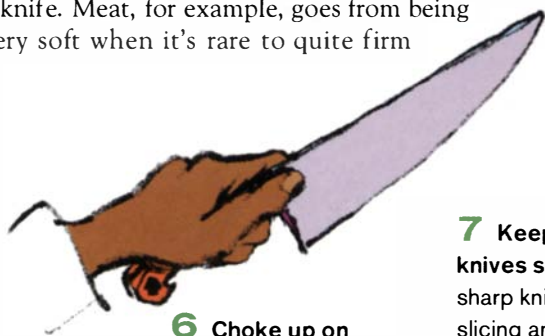
when well done. Touch can also indicate when a cake is baked, if a dough is kneaded enough, and whether a pear is ripe.

Learn from your mistakes—and practice, practice, practice. "Try a new recipe and then repeat the attempt to really 'get it,'" suggests Molly Stevens, a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking* who was a chef-instructor at the New England Culinary Institute in Essex, Vermont.

But what if a recipe doesn't work? Our inclination is to throw the recipe away without another thought. Yet more than one chef advised trying the dish again. "I always tell my students that you learn more from failing than from being successful," says Alford, who is opening her own cooking school that's geared to nonprofessionals. If a recipe doesn't work, try to figure out why. Are you sure you were executing the directions correctly? Oven temperatures vary widely: could that have been the culprit? But there *are* some bad recipes out there that are destined to fail, so compare the failed recipe to others like it; perhaps you'll find a clue to where this one went astray. Should the egg whites have been whisked first? Did the recipe call for too much



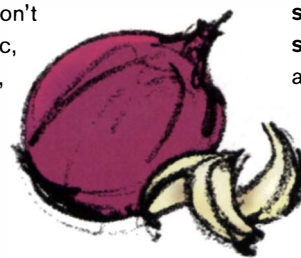
What's the secret to mastering perfect roast chicken? Roast a lot of chickens.



6 Choke up on your chef's knife. For better control, choke up on the handle even to the point of putting your thumb and the side of your index finger onto the side of the blade right above the handle.

7 Keep your knives sharp. A sharp knife makes slicing and chopping easier, neater, quicker. Dull knives are dangerous and make cooking a chore. If you're not the whetstone type, buy an electric sharpener for ease.

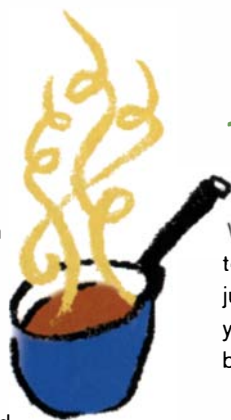
8 Cook onions more and garlic less. Give onions time to take on some color and develop a sweet, round flavor. But don't add chopped garlic, which burns easily, until you've given other ingredients a head start.



9 Remove excess grease from soups, sauces, and stews. It may take a few minutes, but the cleaner flavor is worth it.

10 Clean as you go. A neat workspace is safer and more efficient. (Plus you get to enjoy your meal without the dread of washing all those dirty dishes.)

11 Reduce liquids to concentrate flavor. If you've braised meat or vegetables, take the main ingredient out when it's done and reduce the sauce a bit more before serving. When you deglaze a pan, be sure to reduce the added liquid by boiling it over high heat. Reduce homemade stocks before use, too.



12 Let roasted meats rest before carving. Without a rest to let the meat's juices redistribute, your roast will be dry.

13 Invest in a few heavy-based pans with absolutely flat bottoms to deliver the most even heat. The handles should be sturdy, comfortable, and heatproof so the pot can go from the stove to the oven.

14 Don't be afraid of fat. Using a small bit of good-quality butter—forget margarine—or olive oil adds richness and flavor.

liquid? You'll become a more knowledgeable cook with even just a little digging.

Taste often, and don't forget the salt

If you've ever cooked a beautiful-looking dish, brought it to the table, dug in, and thought, "Eh," (or worse, "Yuck"), you probably weren't tasting as you cooked. "Home cooks don't taste very often [as they cook]," says Seen Lippert, a former Chez Panisse chef who now cooks in New York. Lippert quickly adds that this also happens in professional kitchens, especially when a cook is making the same dish for the twentieth time that day and presumes it tastes the same.

When tasting, keep in mind that the flavor of the dish will change as the cooking continues. For instance, you don't want to season the heck out of a stew that's to simmer for three hours because you find it's not full of flavor after twenty minutes; give it some time to improve. Remember, too, that seasonings mellow and change as food sits, so if you've made something a day in advance, be sure to taste it before serving. Molly Stevens also recommends tasting your ingredients even before

you start cooking. Are the plums especially sweet? Is the cheese salty? This preliminary tasting can help you later as you evaluate the dish and season accordingly.

Don't be stingy with the salt. Though food shouldn't taste salty, going to the opposite extreme and using little or no salt in your cooking results in food that tastes flat. Even if a recipe suggests an amount of salt to use, your ingredients—as well as your palate—may be different enough from the recipe writer's to necessitate adjustments.

Add salt—and all seasonings for that matter—a little at a time; it's easier to add more than to compensate for adding too much.

Thanks to the following people for their input:

*Katherine Alford
Lidia Bastianich
Abigail Johnson Dodge
Gordon Hamersley
Seen Lippert
James Peterson
Molly Stevens
Joanne Weir*

Joanne McAllister Smart is constantly learning how to become a better cook as an associate editor for Fine Cooking. ♦



20 Always have fresh parsley and at least one other fresh herb on hand. You'll be surprised at how fresh herbs lift the flavors of everyday foods.

21 Add a final splash of acid (vinegar, fresh citrus juice) to almost any vegetable or meat dish or fruit dessert at the last minute to perk up the flavor.



22 But add wine to a dish early in the cooking and cook off the alcohol. Adding raw wine to a dish just makes it winy.

23 Warm your plates and bowls before serving. Hot food is better than cold.



15 Grind your own spices. Spices have the most flavor when ground just before use.

16 Use stock instead of water in everything from rice and pasta to deglazing pans for quick sauces. Stock adds remarkable depth and richness to the simplest foods.

17 Begin checking for doneness well before the given time. You can always keep cooking, but you can't undo overcooking.

18 Bake pie and tart crusts longer than you think you should. Pastry doughs taste much better when cooked long enough for the sugars in the crust to caramelize. You're after brown, not pale blond.

19 Take your oven's temperature. Ovens can vary by as much as 50°F, so buy an oven thermometer and get a handle on whether yours runs hot, cool, or dead-on.

Sautéing—what separates amateurs from pros

Learn to sauté well and your cooking will improve dramatically. Why? Not only are properly sautéed foods delicious on their own—a well-browned exterior adds tons of flavor, as well as an appealing color—but other cooking methods, such as braising and roasting often begin with sautéing or searing (a variation on sautéing). Here are a few tips that will greatly improve your sautéing skills.

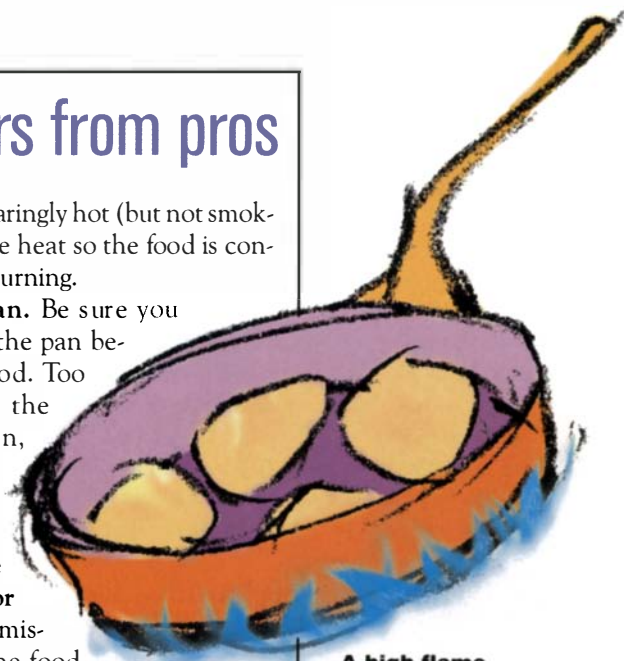
♦ **Dry the food.** Before putting the food in the pan, pat off excess moisture with paper towels; otherwise, the food will steam rather than brown.

♦ **Turn up the heat.** The most important factor for a good sauté is heat—and lots of it. Though a restaurant chef may have a few extra BTUs on his burner, most home chefs don't even turn the heat to high. "People are afraid of heat," notes Gordon Hamersley, chef and owner of Hamersley's Bistro in Boston, adding, "In our house, the heat is either on or off." Put the food in the pan only when the

pan and the fat in it is searingly hot (but not smoking). Then modulate the heat so the food is constantly sizzling but not burning.

♦ **Don't crowd the pan.** Be sure you can see the bottom of the pan between the pieces of food. Too much food will lower the temperature of the pan, creating a lot of steam, meaning you won't get good browning.

♦ **Let the food sit in the hot pan before tossing or turning it.** A common mistake is to fidget with the food, turning and poking at it constantly. To promote browning, leave the food alone—for as long as a few minutes for some foods—before you move it or flip it.



A high flame and enough room in the pan are crucial for proper sautéing.

Books that teach

There are many wonderful cookbooks full of delicious recipes. There are fewer books that really teach the whys behind the recipes. These are among those that do just that.

♦ **Cook it Right**, by Anne Willan (Reader's Digest), describes clearly and accurately in text and photos how food looks, smells, and feels when it's perfectly cooked. It also includes pictures of under- and overcooked foods to better set off the ideal. And, a

boon for all cooks learning from their mistakes, there are many "Quick Fixes" for dishes that come out less than perfect.

♦ **Get in There & Cook**, by Richard Sax (Clarkson N. Potter), proves that once the basic cooking techniques are mastered, working in the kitchen is fun. The book presents a basic repertoire of recipes accompanied by questions, answers, explanations, variations, and digressions.

♦ **The New Making of a Cook**, by Madeleine Kamman (William Morrow), is a huge, comprehensive, yet friendly text that explains in detail every technique you'll ever need in the kitchen.

♦ **CookWise**, by Fine Cooking contributing editor Shirley O. Corriher (William Morrow), tells why and how things happen in cooking. The 230 recipes demonstrate the scientific principles that the text explains in everyday English.

For a Flavor Kick,



Ground spices play the main role in a rub, but herbs, garlic, and other fresh seasonings are great additions.



Spice rubs flavor more than meat. Try chicken, fish, or vegetables. For dry or delicate ingredients, brush on a film of oil to help the spices cling.

Discovering spice rubs was one of my greatest culinary epiphanies. Several years back, I was reading the newly released *Thrill of the Grill* (by Chris Schlesinger & John Willoughby, William Morrow) around the same time that I was spring-cleaning my pantry. Confronted with jars upon jars of spices left over from singular recipes or experiments in global cuisine, I suddenly remembered having read a recipe for spice-rubbed chicken. That night, I mixed together what seemed like an exotic combination of spices, rubbed it onto some chicken breasts, and cooked them on the grill.

I was completely blown away by the striking depth of flavor that I got with such a simple technique. Since that day, spice rubs have become part of my everyday cooking. And no longer do spices grow stale in my pantry—on the contrary, it seems I'm always shopping for more.

As easy as a marinade, but neater and tastier

A spice rub is, simply, a seasoning mixture that you rub onto food before cooking. Traditionally, it's made up of dry spices, which is why you might have also heard it called a dry rub. There's nothing new about rubs—from Caribbean jerked chicken to French goose confit, cooks have long known that the right mixture of seasonings rubbed onto meats before cooking can transform the simplest food into something spectacular. But unlike marinades, basting sauces, or finishing sauces, which coat food with a complimentary flavor, spice rubs permeate, creating complex layers of flavor that leave you asking, "What makes this taste so good?"

Besides giving foods deeper flavor than marinades and sauces, spice rubs are much less messy, especially on the grill, where oil-based marinades can drip and cause flare-ups. I even prefer spice rubs for tough cuts of meat, because most marinades have little effect on tenderizing the interior (no matter how strong) and can even make the surface somewhat mushy. In fact the only solution to tough meat is slow cooking, and here spice rubs are a real boon—as the low heat

of the oven or outdoor barbecue coaxes the meat to tenderness, the spices mingle with the juices, leaving you with a deeply flavored, juicy, and tender treat.

Rubs are versatile and ripe for improvisation

While ground or whole spices generally play the main role in any spice rub, chopped seasonings such as fresh garlic, fresh herbs, citrus zest, nuts, and seeds are great additions. It's always wise to start with a few rather than many ingredients, or the end flavor will become muddled. In fact, one of my favorite rubs is the very simplest: I take a single whole spice, such as cumin, fennel, or cinnamon; toast it briefly to punch up its flavor (I'll get to that shortly), and then grind it as fine or as coarse as I like and rub it all

over a rib steak, a chicken breast, or a few pork chops.

Once you're confident with simple blends, go for more complexity. Indian curries are the quintessential spice mixture, so I like to use them as a blueprint. Curries most often begin with turmeric, cumin, coriander, fennel seed, peppercorns, and chiles, to name a few (which flavor is dominant depends on the curry and the cook). From there, most recipes add a warmer, or sweeter, "back-

ground" flavor to round out the mixture, such as cinnamon, nutmeg, mace, allspice, ginger, or cardamom. Or, I may take another direction and add an herbal note to the mix—dried thyme, sage, oregano, and savory are especially good. I've also had great results using ground nuts and seeds, as well as ground dried mushrooms, which give an earthy background flavor to the Sesame-Ginger Chicken on p. 66.

When concocting a rub, think geographically. A good strategy for combining flavors is to ask yourself what seasoning you typically recognize in the particular cooking of a region. For example, a Mediterranean spice rub might contain fennel, mustard seed, rosemary, and lavender, whereas an Asian rub might have hints of ginger, coriander, sesame, and hot chiles.

To bring out a rub's full flavor, don't forget the salt. Add a little salt to the rub, or season whatever

Simple spice rubs add complex layers of flavor to meat, chicken, seafood, even vegetables

BY MOLLY STEVENS

Rub in the Spices

"I love to use my hands when I cook, which is one reason I like spice rubs.

The best way to apply one is to do just that—rub," says Molly Stevens.



you'll be cooking directly with salt. One warning, though: if you're planning to rub the food several hours before cooking, you should wait and sprinkle on a little salt just before cooking. You'll notice that the salt draws moisture from meat, leaving the spice-rubbed surface slightly soggy, which means you'll want to pat the meat dry before cooking and you might lose some of the rub.

Light brown sugar is one of my secret ingredients. While too much sugar in a spice rub will cause it to burn, a small bit can foster a darker crust and deeper

flavor, as you'll see in the Spice Rub for Steak or Lamb on p. 66.

A coating of rub can be thick or thin

You'll see from the recipe yields that follow that I like a heavy coating of spice on most foods. Especially when it comes to good thick steaks, I love the contrast of a crunchy, spicy exterior with the succulence of the inside. But one of the great things about rubs is that they're so adaptable, so it's easy to take a different tack with delicate foods. *(Continued)*

Toasting and grinding spices



Heat a small skillet over medium heat and toast the whole spice, shaking the pan occasionally. Toast until fragrant and starting to darken, 3 to 5 minutes, and then take the pan off the heat. Pour the spices onto a plate to keep them from cooking further.



If you're using bay leaves, add them to the pan at this point and let them dry briefly on the residual heat of the skillet (don't put them back over the heat). If you're lucky enough to find fresh bay leaves, toast them until they're dry enough to crumble.



Pour the toasted spices into a mortar or a spice grinder and grind them with the other spices and seasonings. Press down to crack any harder spices such as black peppercorns and whole allspice, and then work in a circular motion to grind the spices to a powder. Be sure not to overfill the mortar. A coarse grind leaves you with more texture and larger bits of spice and seed. A fine grind is subtler, and the flavors will be more evenly blended.



"I love the aromas released from spices as I grind them—sometimes they inspire me to change the recipe or pick the perfect side dish for it," says Molly Stevens.

◆ **For vegetables and anything else that's dry or delicate,** use a light coating of oil. No matter how hard you rub, a spice rub won't cling to the surface of a vegetable. To solve this, coat the vegetables first with a thin cloak of oil and then roll them in the spices. This is a delicious pre-grilling treatment for thick slabs of eggplant, summer squash, and onions.

◆ **For tender fillets of fish that may fall apart if rubbed too vigorously,** such as salmon or halibut, a tiny bit of oil first before you apply the spice rub helps it adhere, and a sparser coating of the rub itself can be a good complement. Less rub will season less intensely, and for more delicate flavors, a light touch works better.

◆ **For chicken,** slip a bit of the mixture under the skin as well as over the top. This technique not only helps crisp the skin, but it also ensures that the flavors of the rub come into direct contact with the meat.

Depending on your schedule and on the intensity you're after, most foods can be coated with the spice rub up to six hours in advance and refrigerated until you're ready to cook. Remember that the longer food sits with a rub on it, the more flavor it will absorb from the spices. If you're rubbing in advance, hold off on the salt until it's time to cook.

Rubs keep for weeks and are handy leftovers

Dry rubs keep for weeks in a covered jar, and any mixtures containing fresh ingredients like garlic or herbs will keep in the fridge for a week. Beyond rubbing onto meat, poultry, and seafood, a spoonful of

spice rub is great stirred into pilafs, stews, salad dressings, and stir-fries.

Cook rubbed foods all different ways

I confess to a preference for grilling spice-rubbed foods: something about that smoky char-grilled flavor really hits home with the zesty flavors of a spicy crust. But sautéing, roasting, and even braising can all work. If you move the food around a bit during cooking, such as flipping fish in a sauté pan, you may lose bits of the spice crust, but don't worry: simply deglaze the pan after cooking and use the pan juices as a quick sauce. The same applies to bits of rub that end up in the roasting pan: the pan drippings will create a perfectly complementary sauce.

And a final word about appearances: leaner cuts of meat with a dry rub may not look as succulent and juicy after cooking as sauced or marinated meat. Recently I served spice-rubbed pork to a few friends, and one of them bluntly remarked that it looked as dry as jerky. He recanted, however, once he cut into it and tasted all the wonderfully juicy, spiced meat.

RECIPES

Curry-Mint Rub for Jumbo Shrimp

Some people would say curry powder is a spice mix unto itself, but when I use it as a single element, it makes this rub all the more complex. I like the zip that curry powder gives this rub, which is equally good on pork, seafood, or poultry. *Yields $\frac{1}{3}$ cup of rub; serves four.*

- 1 Tbs. toasted ground coriander (if you're using whole coriander seed, see the sidebar opposite)
- 3 Tbs. finely chopped fresh mint



Caribbean spices give grilled pork tenderloin an irresistible crust. The meat is juicy and succulent.



- $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. curry powder
- 2 small cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tsp. ground ginger
- 1 tsp. cracked black or white peppercorns
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. salt
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb. jumbo shrimp (about 20), rinsed, shelled (tails left on), deveined, and patted dry

Heat the broiler or prepare a grill fire. In a large bowl, combine the coriander, mint, curry powder, garlic, ginger, peppercorns, and salt. Toss the shrimp with the rub and then thread them onto skewers. Broil or grill until just opaque and cooked through, 5 to 6 min., turning once.

A curry-mint rub adds punch to skewered grilled shrimp. The longer the rub sits on the uncooked shrimp, the zingier the flavors will be.

Caribbean-Style Rub for Grilled Pork Tenderloin

For more surface and crust, butterfly the tenderloin, as in the variation on p. 66. If you do, mix a double batch of rub so you're sure to have enough. If you don't have a mortar and are using ground spices, crush everything in a small mixing bowl with a wooden spoon. *Yields about $\frac{1}{3}$ cup of rub, enough for four chops or two $\frac{3}{4}$ - to 1-pound tenderloins. Serves four to six.*

- $1\frac{1}{2}$ Tbs. ground allspice (if you're using whole allspice, see the sidebar opposite)
- 2 dried bay leaves
- 3 Tbs. fresh thyme leaves, chopped
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. sweet paprika
- $\frac{1}{8}$ tsp. ground cloves
- $\frac{1}{8}$ tsp. ground nutmeg
- Scant $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. salt
- 1 habanero chile (cored, seeded, and ribs removed), finely minced
- 2 small cloves garlic, minced
- 2 pork tenderloins (about 1 lb. each) or 4 pork chops, trimmed of fat and silverskin

Heat a gas grill to medium high, or prepare a charcoal grill. If you're using whole allspice, grind it in a mortar and pestle to a fine powder. If you're using ground allspice, put it in a small mixing bowl. If you're

using fresh bay leaves, toast them briefly to dry. Crumble the bay leaves and grind them in the mortar with the allspice. Add the thyme and grind a few times so the leaves release their essence. Add the paprika, cloves, nutmeg, salt, habanero, and garlic; crush or grind until well combined. Pat the rub all over the meat. Grill uncovered, turning just a few times, until the meat is springy when squeezed, 18 to 20 min., or until an instant-read thermometer reads 150°F. (The USDA recommends 160°F, but I like mine juicier.) Transfer the meat to a platter and tent with foil. Let rest for 10 min. before serving.

Butterflied variation—Make an incision down the length of the tenderloin, cutting two-thirds of the way into the meat and stopping a few inches above the end where the tail narrows. Open the tenderloin like a book, pressing the meat with the heel of your hand to flatten it evenly. The tenderloin should be a uniform $\frac{3}{4}$ - to 1-inch thickness. Repeat with the second tenderloin. Pat the rub all over the meat. Grill uncovered until the meat is springy when poked, 12 to 15 min., turning halfway through cooking. Transfer to a platter and tent with foil. Let rest for 5 to 10 min. before serving.

Spice Rub for Steak or Lamb

I love this rub for steaks on the grill, but it's also great with lamb chops. Use whole cumin seed for the best flavor. *Yields a generous $\frac{1}{3}$ cup of rub, enough for four to six steaks or chops.*

- 2 Tbs. ground cumin** (if you're using whole cumin seed, see the sidebar at on p. 64)
- 1 Tbs. dried oregano**
- 1 Tbs. coarsely ground black peppercorns**
- 1 Tbs. brown sugar, preferably light**
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. ground cinnamon**
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. sweet paprika**
- 1 tsp. salt**
- 4 sirloin or New York strip steaks** (about 8 oz. each), about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch thick



A peppery rub pairs well with beef or lamb, especially when you grill the meat.

Prepare a grill fire. In a small bowl, combine the ground cumin, oregano, peppercorns, brown sugar, cinnamon, paprika, and salt. Pat the rub all over the steaks. Grill the steaks over a medium-hot fire, about 5 min. per side, or until done to your liking.



Sesame seeds give these chicken breasts a savory, crispy crust. Pulverized dried porcini mushrooms provide earthy depth.

Sesame-Ginger Rub for Chicken

This rub works well with sautéed poultry, fish, or pork. For the mushrooms, I prefer dried porcini, but you can use a mix of dried wild mushrooms. *Yields $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of rub, enough for four chicken breast halves.*

- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sesame seeds**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ oz. porcini or other dried mushrooms, ground to a powder in a blender** (to yield $\frac{1}{4}$ cup)
- 2 tsp. grated fresh ginger**
- 4 small cloves garlic, minced**
- 1 tsp. ground coriander**
- $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. salt**
- Pinch cayenne**
- 4 skinless, boneless chicken breast halves** (about 6 oz. each), trimmed
- 2 Tbs. canola oil**

Heat a small skillet over medium heat and toast the sesame seeds, shaking the pan occasionally, until fragrant and just starting to brown, 2 to 3 min. Immediately transfer to a shallow bowl to prevent over-toasting. Add the mushroom powder, ginger, garlic, coriander, salt, and cayenne, stirring well to evenly distribute the ginger and garlic. Dredge each chicken breast in the rub, coating both sides thoroughly. Put the oil in a large skillet and set it over medium-high heat until the oil is very hot. Brown the chicken breasts for 2 to 3 min. on each side. Reduce the heat to medium low and cook until the crust is browned, the chicken feels firm when you press it, and an instant-read thermometer reads 160°F, about 12 min.

Molly Stevens is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. ♦

Making Perfect Fruit Tarts

A well-browned crust, a light and satiny pastry cream, and the ripest fruit—artfully arranged—are the keys

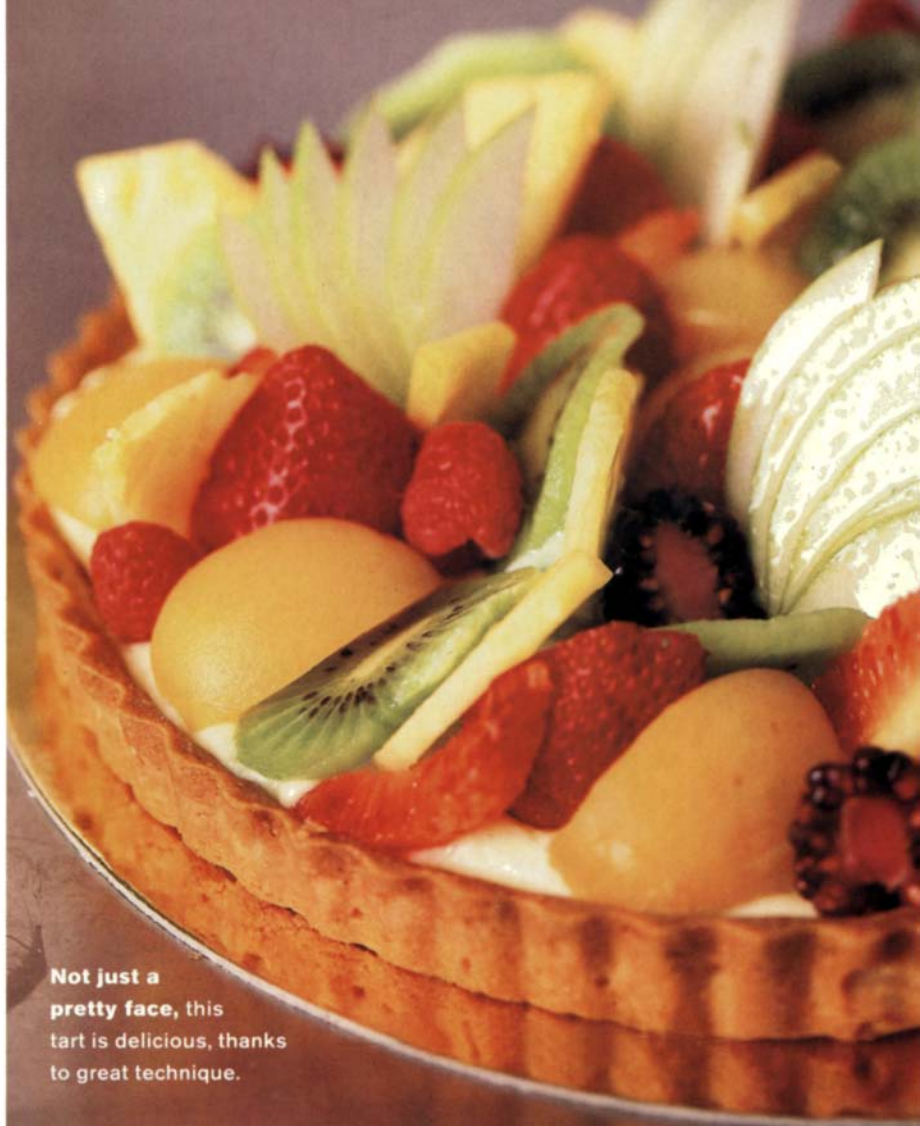
BY FRANÇOIS PAYARD WITH JOANNE CHANG

Why is it that you can find plenty of fresh fruit tarts that look good, but very few that actually taste good? Too often you're attracted by shiny, colorful fruit and then disappointed by a soggy crust, gluey pastry cream, and flavorless fruit. I take a lot of pride in the fact that the tarts we make at my shop don't share this problem. When a customer takes a bite of the tart, it tastes even better than it looks—and it looks great.

I have no real secrets to making my tarts; it's more a matter of good technique. Because fresh fruit tarts are simple and uncomplicated, it's important that every element be prepared with care. With something so simple, in fact, each element has to be perfect.

The parts of the tart

First is a lesson that I try to instill in my pastry cooks the very first day they come to work for me. The tart shell must be cooked until brown. Not white, not pale, not beige, but BROWN. I find that almost all novice cooks never cook a tart shell enough; they're



Not just a pretty face, this tart is delicious, thanks to great technique.

Make the sweet pastry dough



Put the butter, confectioners' sugar, salt, and vanilla in a food processor; process until very soft, smooth, and well blended. Sift together the two flours. Add them and pulse just until incorporated; the dough will look slightly crumbly. Add the egg and process again until smooth and creamy.



Scrape the dough onto a lightly floured work surface. Divide it and shape each half into a disk. Wrap each disk well in plastic wrap and chill for at least an hour. (You'll only use one disk for this tart; freeze the other one for up to four months.)

Roll the dough and line the tart pan



Let the dough rest at room temperature for 10 to 15 minutes so it softens slightly. Unwrap it and place it on a lightly floured work surface. Roll the dough into a round, using even pressure and turning the disk a quarter turn after each pass of the rolling pin. Flour the work surface and the dough very lightly as needed.

too scared to cook it fully, convinced that they will burn it. But you must cook a tart shell until it's completely brown in order to bring out the warm, sweet, buttery taste of the pastry; here I use a sweet dough called *pâte sucrée*. If you don't bake it long enough, then your pastry will have a raw, doughy texture with a floury flavor that will sit in your mouth like glue.

I like to line my pastry shells with a layer of almond cream, also called frangipane. The frangipane reinforces the bottom of the shell and helps support the weight of the fruit; without it, the shell is much more likely to break apart. And, perhaps more important, it protects the shell from getting soggy from the leaking fruit juices and pastry cream. The subtle almond flavor of the frangipane doesn't stand out, but it's a flavor that's flattering to just about every type of fruit.

A light and creamy pastry cream is one of the key differences between a nondescript fruit tart and



Continue rolling until the dough is a shade more than $\frac{1}{8}$ inch thick and very even.



With a docker or a sharp-tined fork, prick the entire surface of the dough.

a spectacular one. The role of the cream is to hold the fruit in place and to accent its fresh textures and flavors. I make a basic pastry cream, but then I lighten it with whipped cream to keep it from being gluey and dense. The cream is rich tasting, slightly billowy, and a delightful foil to the crisp pastry and juicy fruit.

Finally, the fruit you choose for your tart will determine whether you end up with a tart that's bursting with sweet, juicy flavor or one that's merely okay. Select whatever fruits are in season—don't just try to replicate what I've done here. In early summer, when apricots and strawberries reach their perfumy heights, highlight them in your tart. In the hot, late summer months, fill your tarts with perfectly ripened peaches, plums, and cherries. During the winter, when your selection of fruits is more limited, focus on sweet and tart apples, juicy pears, bright citrus fruit, and luscious tropicals like mangos and pineapples.

A removable-bottom pan is easy; a flan ring takes more practice

You can use a regular removable-bottom tart pan, though I prefer a French bottomless flan ring (see the photo at right). Every



A straight flan ring gives your crust a smooth edge and a crisp bottom.



Gently roll the dough around the rolling pin and transfer it to a 9-inch tart pan. With the pricked side of the dough facing down now, unroll the dough round and drape it over the pan, taking care not to stretch it.



With your thumb, carefully push the dough down into the pan where the base and sides of the pan meet, and then push the dough carefully onto the sides of the pan, pinching to make neat, straight upper walls.



With a paring knife, trim off any overhang so the dough doesn't extend higher than the pan. Chill the lined tart pan for at least 1 hour.

pâtisserie in France that I know of uses the straight-edged flan ring because it makes a cleaner, straighter tart whose sides are less likely to buckle and fall inward. You can buy these at specialty cookware shops (see Sources, p. 76), and I recommend buying one or two if you make tarts regularly. Because they have no bottom, you obviously need to have a good sheet pan underneath them. Make sure yours is perfectly flat and fairly heavy-duty. For this article, I'm using the tart pan because that's what most people have.

Standard components, with tasty technical upgrades

The size of your tart will dictate the thickness of the dough. If you're making a large tart, say 10 inches or bigger, the shell has to be thicker—almost $\frac{1}{4}$ inch—to support the greater amount of filling than if you're making a bunch of individual tartlets, which can manage with a thinner, more delicate crust.

One more detail about the tart crust: when you roll it out, keep turning the disk of dough as you go. I give a quarter turn after each roll to make sure that the disk is rolling out smoothly and uniformly. By regularly turning the disk, you also can make sure the dough isn't sticking to the work surface.

I do two things to my frangipane that make a crucial difference. First, I make sure the frangipane is nice and fluffy because I want the layer to bake off light and tender, not dense and chewy. To do this, I start by creaming the butter and sugar really well, and then when the cream is finished, I give it a few more seconds in the mixer to aerate it and fluff it up. I use almond flour (see Sources, p. 76), which is fine

Showcasing the fruit

On most fruit tarts, the fruit is arranged in nice patterns on the surface. Maybe some whole strawberries or raspberries stand vertically, but generally the fruit lies in the same plane as the cream. I do things a little differently. I arrange most of the fruit so it's standing up in the cream. It looks really dramatic, and it lets me create colorful juxtapositions of different fruits.

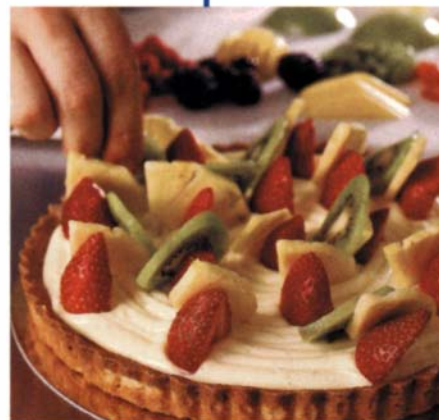
♦ **Play with the shapes.** Different shapes—spiky, round, angular—add to the beauty of the tart.

♦ **Pay attention to the different “views”** you're creating.

It's a bit like flower arranging. If you want to present the tart with one side as the “front,” arrange your fruit so it looks best from that angle. If you want an all-over view, check the different angles as you construct the tart.

♦ **Add a few special touches.**

Apple slices add lots of feathery texture. I cut a small wedge of apple into five or six very thin slices and spread them out into a fan. Sometimes I'll take an apricot half or portion of kiwi, score crosshatches on the surface, and then push on the skin side so the tiny cubes stick out. Blueberries tossed in confectioners' sugar look great. Sprinkle them on as a finishing touch.



Any kind of fruit can look beautiful with some thoughtful arranging.

Make the frangipane



Heat the oven to 325°F. Cream the butter with an electric mixer until it's light and fluffy, about 5 minutes. Add the sugar and continue to cream well. Add the three remaining ingredients—ground almonds, flour, and yolks—blending well after each addition. The mixture should be light and fluffy.



Put the frangipane in a pastry bag with a wide tip and pipe an even layer into the chilled tart shell.



Bake in the heated oven until the shell is thoroughly browned on the sides and the bottom and the frangipane is a deep gold, 40 to 50 minutes. Cool the tart, still in the pan, on a rack.

and powdery, to make the frangipane. You can make an acceptable substitute by grinding sliced almonds in a food processor until very fine.

The other important point is to spread the frangipane evenly in the shell so there won't be any thick, undercooked spots. You can use a spoon to spread it, but I prefer to pipe it in so I'm assured that the tart has the same thickness of frangipane everywhere.

Like frangipane, pastry cream is a simple and classic filling, and I make a straightforward version, but again, I use a couple of tricks to make mine taste good and have a light, silky quality rather than the familiar pasty feel. At the *pâtisserie*, we use a professional French ingredient called *flan powder* instead of flour. It makes a lighter, smoother pastry cream with no hint of a starchy taste. In the recipe here, however, I use flour, which makes a perfectly delicious pastry cream. You must, however, be sure

to cook it at a boil long enough to cook off the raw flour flavor. The other thing I do that improves the texture of the pastry cream is that, once the cream has cooled, I beat it again in the mixer, preferably with a paddle attachment, to loosen it up and lighten it before I fold in the whipped cream.

Once you've taken the time to make each of your base components—crust, frangipane, pastry cream—as good as they can be, you can start having fun with the fruits. But before you start decorating, I must re-emphasize that the most important element of a good fruit tart is ripe and flavorful fruit, so pick yours carefully. See the sidebar on p. 69 for helpful tips on arranging your fruit.

The final, finishing touch is a light coat of glaze to keep the fruit from drying out. Professionals use something called *nappage* (a clear, sweet glaze made from glucose and gelatin), but a good home substitute is apple jelly or strained apricot preserves. A sheer, shiny coat will make your fruit tart look elegant and appealing from the moment you finish assembling it to the moment the lucky diners bite into it.

RECIPE

Fresh Fruit Tart

Yields one 9-inch tart (with enough dough for another tart); serves six to eight.

FOR THE PÂTE SUCRÉE:

5 oz. (10 Tbs.) unsalted butter, cut into chunks and softened at room temperature

3½ oz. (¾ cup) confectioners' sugar, sifted

Want to see this in action?

Check out our video on making fruit tarts on *Fine Cooking's* web site. <http://finecooking.com>

Make the lightened pastry cream



In a saucepan, heat the milk with the vanilla pod and seeds until it steams; let it steep, off the heat, for a few minutes. In a small bowl, whisk the egg yolks, sugar, and flour. Pour a bit of the hot milk into the yolks and whisk to blend.



Pour the yolk mixture into the rest of the milk and put the pan back on medium heat, whisking constantly and rapidly until the mixture boils; let it boil for 1 minute, still whisking, and then take it off the heat. Pour the pastry cream into a bowl; put a piece of plastic wrap directly on the surface of the cream and chill at least 1 hour. Beat the chilled pastry cream with a mixer or a wooden spoon until it's lighter, looser, and lump-free.

Put it all together



Whip the cream until it holds soft but definite peaks. Carefully fold the whipped cream into the pastry cream.



Put the cream into a pastry bag with a wide tip and pipe an even layer into the shell.

$\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. salt
Seeds scraped from $\frac{1}{4}$ vanilla bean, or 1 tsp. vanilla extract
 $4\frac{1}{2}$ oz. (1 cup) all-purpose flour
2 oz. ($\frac{1}{2}$ cup) cake flour
1 large egg

FOR THE FRANGIPANE:

3 oz. (6 Tbs.) unsalted butter, softened
6 Tbs. sugar
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup finely ground almonds
1 Tbs. all-purpose flour
2 egg yolks

FOR THE LIGHT PASTRY CREAM:

$\frac{2}{3}$ cup milk
 $\frac{1}{4}$ vanilla bean, scraped, or $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. vanilla extract
2 egg yolks
2 Tbs. sugar
1 Tbs. all-purpose flour
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup heavy cream

FOR THE FRUIT:

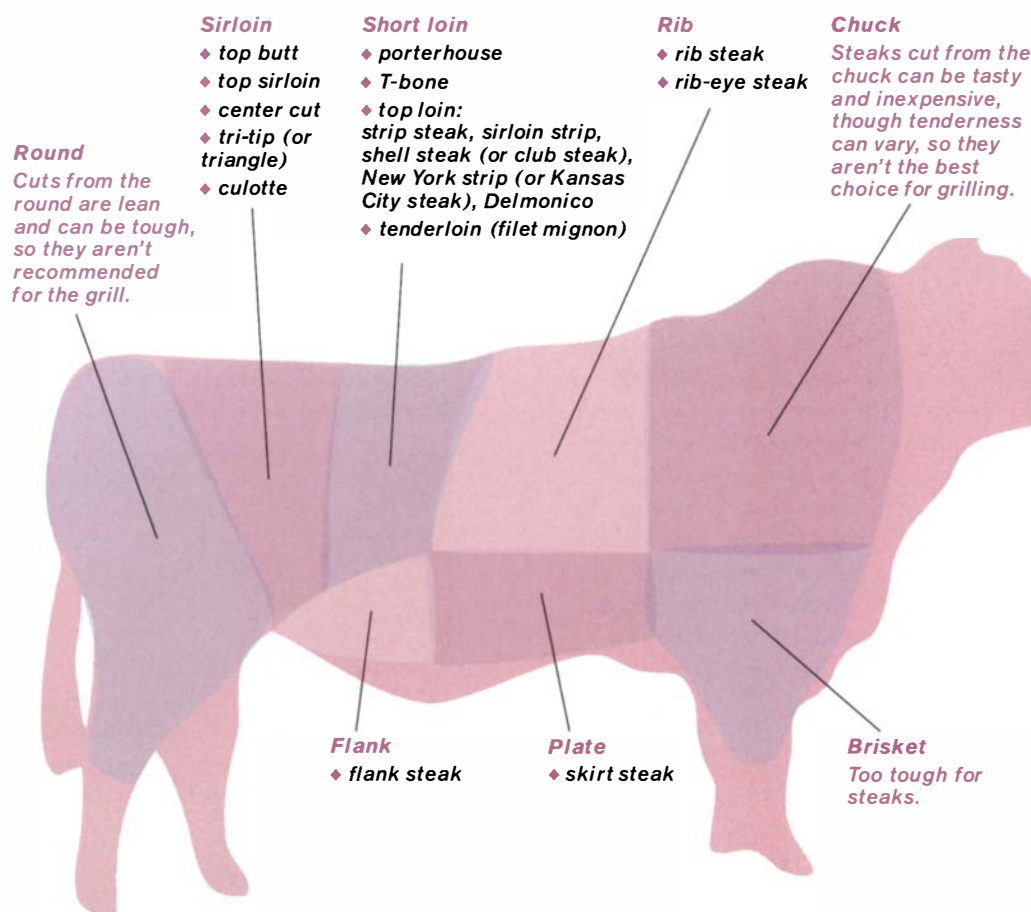
A mix of fresh, ripe fruit
Apple jelly, gently heated until runny

For the method, read the text and then follow the photos and captions starting on p. 67.

François Payard is the chef-owner of Payard Pâtisserie & Bistro in New York City. Joanne Chang was a pastry cook at Payard Pâtisserie before becoming the pastry chef at Mistral restaurant in Boston. ♦



Arrange the fruit in a pretty pattern, placing the pieces upright when possible. With a clean pastry brush, coat the fruit with a thin layer of glaze.



Top-loin steaks are created when the butcher first removes the entire tenderloin to sell separately, leaving behind only the top-loin muscle.

The sirloin

The sirloin is the hip section, between the short loin and the round, and it comprises various muscles configured around the pelvic bone. Several good-tasting, moderately tender steaks come from the sirloin (including the butt end of the tenderloin), but it is difficult to generalize since the characters of the individual muscles differ quite a bit. You'll find both boneless and bone-in sirloin steaks; the bone is often referred to as the pin, flat, round, or wedge bone. Good choices for grilling are top butt, top sirloin, center-cut, tri-tip, triangle, or culotte. These cuts are a good value, too—often less expensive than steaks from the rib or short loin.

Choosing tender steaks for the grill

When shopping for a good steak to grill, it helps to understand some anatomy. The first lesson is that meat is muscle, and the relative condition of the muscle determines the taste and tenderness of the meat. A protected, little-used muscle such as the tenderloin will be tender and finely grained with a relatively mild flavor, while a stronger, well-exercised muscle will be tougher and more flavorful.

The rib

The rib section begins just behind the shoulder (or chuck) and runs to the bottom of the rib cage. Positioned between some of the toughest (chuck) and most tender (short loin)

parts of the animal, the well-marbled rib meat has a unique balance of flavor and tenderness that real beef lovers revere. This location also means that the two ends of the rib offer rather different steaks. The steaks from the end closest to the short loin (known as the small end) are the tenderest and have a neat, well-defined eye muscle; steaks from the shoulder end (the large end) may be slightly tougher, with a less well-defined eye.

The short loin

The short loin runs from the last rib to the top of the hip bone, and the only bone in the short loin is the backbone itself. Sitting high up on the

animal, the short loin is one of the least exercised muscles of all and, therefore, it's the most tender. Unlike the rib, which has one primary muscle, the short loin has two: the tenderloin and the top loin, separated by the backbone. The top loin is actually a continuation of the rib-eye muscle and has many of the same characteristics. The tenderloin muscle, tucked beneath the backbone, is noticeably more tender and fine-grained. A bit of both muscles is included in some steak cuts. Porterhouse steaks have the most tenderloin (at least 1¼ inches in diameter); T-bones have the least (as small as ½ inch in diameter).

The flank

Unlike the naturally tender "middle meats" (rib and short loin), flank steak is a well-exercised, naturally lean muscle from the underside of the animal. Easily recognizable by its flat, oblong shape and its distinctive grain that runs lengthwise along the muscle, flank may lack tenderness, but it more than makes up for it in flavor. To prepare good flank steak, never cook it beyond medium and always slice it thinly across the grain to make it more chewable. Skirt steak, sometimes confused with flank steak, is a long, thin muscle that's fattier and more tender than flank; it comes from the plate.



Too hot: Don't start cooking if the coals are still flaming. From this point, they'll take 20 to 25 minutes to reach medium-hot.



Hot: A very hot fire like this one is fine for searing steaks. Look for a layer of white ash over glowing red coals.



Medium hot: When many coals are yellow-brown, the fire is medium hot. Double-check with the "hand test" before you cook.

How to judge the temperature of your charcoal grill

Keeping a charcoal grill at a consistent temperature is a challenge. The weather, the size of the grill, and the fuel you use—hardwood charcoal (shown here) burns a good 300° hotter than standard briquettes—all affect the strength of the fire. But you do have some control over how hot your fire is when you start to cook. This is important, as the biggest mistake grillers tend to make is starting to cook too soon. For most direct cooking, you want a medium-hot fire, though chops and burgers can benefit from higher heat. Fish and vegetables require a more gentle, medium heat.

No matter what you're cooking, wait until the flames die before starting. Active flames mean the charcoal is still igniting and giving off a fair amount of smoke. At this stage, not only will the flames char the outside of the food without cooking the inside, but the smoke is filled with unburned particles of fuel that will make your food taste somewhat like smoky ashes. (Standard charcoal briquettes also give off a lot of unhealthy fumes and chemical flavors as they ignite).

Use your eyes and hands to judge the readiness of the fire. After the

flames subside and the glowing coals are covered with a light, white-hot ash (an occasional flame may still flicker up), the fire is at its hottest. At this point, set the cooking grate in place to heat up; food sticks to a cold grill. Also, since the rate of cooking is largely determined by how

grills allow you to raise and lower the cooking surface as you like.

The best test is the "hand test" (see the chart at left for the method). If the heat forces you to withdraw your hand immediately, you have a very hot fire—hotter than any standard kitchen broiler.

For a fire that's less hot, wait 8 to 10 minutes and test again. When the coals have cooled to medium, the glowing red bits will be less apparent, and many of the coals will have turned yellow-brown.

Each stage of heat lasts about 8 to 12 minutes, but a few tricks can extend the time. A fire built with hardwood will cool more slowly. A large, thick bed of coals will hold its heat better than a small or sparse bed. Covering a kettle-type grill will slow the burning, or cooling, of the fire (leave the bottom vents open a bit to keep the fire going). Without a cover, a good-size fire will remain hot enough to cook on for 30 to 45 minutes, although it will be cooling gradually; covering the grill will extend this time to an hour.

Molly Stevens is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. ♦

HOW HOT IS YOUR GRILL?

To test the heat, hold your outstretched palm an inch or two above the cooking grate. The length of time you can stand the heat tells you how hot the grill is. The same test can be used for gas grills.

time palm can be held over grill	grill heat	temperature range
less than 1 second	very hot	over 600°F
1 to 2 seconds	hot	400° to 500°F
3 to 4 seconds	medium	350° to 375°F
5 to 7 seconds	medium-low	325° to 350°F

far the food is from the coals, you need the grate in place to determine the cooking temperature. Hot coals burn at upwards of 2,000°F, but it only takes a short distance (2 to 6 inches) to temper this terrific heat to more manageable cooking temperatures. The cooking surface on a standard kettle grill sits about 4 inches from the coals; other types of

Sherbet vs. sorbet

Recently I overheard a customer at my local scoop shop order lemon sherbet. All the shop could offer her was lemon sorbet, and unfortunately, no one behind the counter could explain the difference.

The word *sorbet* is really just the French translation of the English word *sherbet* (often misspelled *sherbert*). Both words (and the Italian *sorbetto*)



sherbet



sorbet

are derived from the Turkish *sharbat*, a sweetened frozen fruit drink.

Over the years, however, sorbet and sherbet have come to mean different things in this country. Today, sherbet

contains egg whites, milk, or gelatin (or a combination) to give it a creamy consistency, while sorbet is made without gelatin, eggs, or dairy products (though it may have pectin or vegetable-based thickeners). The changeover to sorbet started a decade or so ago when savvy marketers started using the French word to refer to new, upgraded, gourmet ices made with more attention to flavor and texture.



The fixings for tapenade illustrate the vivid flavors of Provence.

The cuisine of Provence is defined by its landscape, where olive trees terrace the rocky hillsides and thyme, sage, rosemary, and fennel grow wild, along with juniper bushes and bay laurel trees. Along the Mediterranean coast, anchovies are caught and more often than not cured in salt, preserving and intensifying their flavor. These ingredients—along with lots and lots of garlic—give Provençal cooking its bold and vibrant character.

Often combined with tomato, these strong flavors are used to create such delicious, classically Provençal recipes as bouillabaisse, ratatouille, salade niçoise, and the garlicky mayonnaise called aioli (pronounced ay-oh-lee) that's found everywhere in Provence. In fact, garlic is so highly regarded in Provence that the region hosts an annual summer celebration called Le Grand Aioli. Villagers gather at community tables for a feast of locally grown boiled potatoes, beets, green beans, carrots, and salt cod served alongside

bowls and bowls of homemade aioli.

But if there were one recipe that captures the spirit of Provence, I'd vote for tapenade, a tangy, full-flavored spread made by puréeing olives, anchovies, and capers with plenty of olive oil, garlic, a squeeze of lemon, and perhaps a sprinkling of thyme. Like most great Provençal recipes, the flavorings are robust but not heavy-handed, the ingredients mixed so that they meld without anyone flavor—even the garlic—standing out.

Lavender is adored, but more often in the field or as a fragrance. One flavoring that often gets mentioned as important to Provençal cooking is lavender. Regarded by many as a symbol of southern France because it blooms so

beautifully and bountifully there, lavender is really used more as a fragrance for soap and candles than as a culinary flavoring. The flower does provide the region with its wonderful lavender honey, and you do find it occasionally infusing custards and ice creams, but mostly at high-end restaurants, not at home.

Dried lavender flowers are also featured in the renowned, eponymous dried herb mixture, *herbes de Provence*. But the mix is just as often made without lavender, reflecting those herbs that appear, usually fresh and in great abundance, in just about every savory dish. These include thyme, rosemary, marjoram, and sage. You'll almost always find lavender among the *herbes de Provence* sold in those cute clay crocks, mainly because the addition has come to be seen (mostly by people outside of Provence) as more authentically Provençal. And if it's just a pinch, so as not to make the mixture too floral, and if that pretty color makes you think of sunny days under the azure sky eating rosemary-scented lamb chops, grilled bread with tapenade, and garlicky green beans, then it's fine with me.

Ethel Brennan, a writer and food stylist who lives in San Francisco, spent her childhood summers in Provence, eating homemade goat cheese and anchovy pizzas. With her mother, Georgeanne, she wrote Goat Cheese: Delectable Recipes for All Occasions (Chronicle). ♦

Experiment with the flavors of Provence

- ♦ Sauté eggplant, tomatoes, red peppers, and zucchini with garlic and olive oil, and then cook slowly for a classic summer ratatouille.
- ♦ Stir a finely chopped anchovy fillet and minced garlic into a simple vinaigrette for a full-bodied salad dressing.
- ♦ Toss penne with grilled fennel, tomatoes, olives, and a drizzle of olive oil for a Provençal-inspired pasta.
- ♦ Rub a mixture of salt, pepper, finely chopped garlic, and rosemary onto tender lamb chops before grilling.

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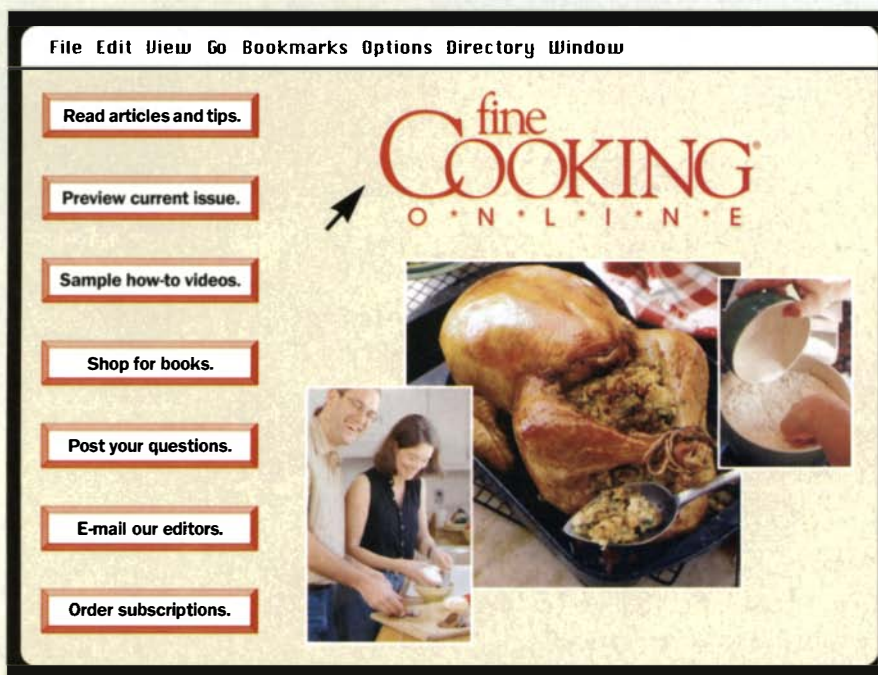
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Thai Salads

If you don't live near a grocer that stocks Asian ingredients, try **Anzen Importers** (503/233-5111), **The Spice Merchant** (800/551-5999 or www.email.com/spice), or **The Oriental Pantry** (800/828-0368 or www.orientalpantry.com).

Herbs

For fresh herbs, Aliza Green recommends **Indian Rock Produce** (800/882-0512) in Quaker Town, Pennsylvania. Ask for their catalog of herbs and greens.

Paella

Shallow steel paella pans can sometimes be found in Latin American or Hispanic markets. Or order them from **The Spanish Table** (206/682-2827) in Seattle, which carries paella pans in a range of sizes, along with *bomba* rice and many other Spanish products.

Rolling Pins

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and large and small hobnailed hardtack pins, as well as simpler pins, from **Sweet Celebrations** (800/328-6722). **The House-on-the-Hill** stocks spectacular springerle pins (630/969-2624); a catalog costs \$2.

Spice Rubs

For top-quality spices, try **A Cook's Wares** (800/915-9788 or www.cookswares.com), **Adriana's Caravan** (800/316-0820 or www.adrianascaravan.com), or **Penzeys Spices** (414/679-7207 or www.penzeys.com).

Fruit Tarts

For almond flour (ground almonds), try **La Cuisine** (800/521-1176), **New York Cake & Baking Company** (212/675-2253), or **Almond**

Plaza (800/225-6887). You can find flan rings at many well-stocked cookware shops, and also from **La Cuisine**, **New York Cake and Baking** (both above) and **A Cook's Wares** (800/915-9788 or www.cookswares.com).


Artisan Foods

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NUTRITION INFORMATION

Recipe (analysis per serving)	Page	Calories		Protein (g)	Carb (g)	Fats (g)				Chol (mg)	Sodium (mg)	Fiber (g)	Notes
		total	from fat			total	sat	mono	poly				
Eggplant & Tomato Gratin	27	270	180	7	18	20	5	11	3	20	620	5	1/8 recipe
Zucchini & Summer Squash Gratin	28	200	120	9	12	14	4	8	1	10	540	3	1/8 recipe
Red Potato & Tomato Gratin	29	280	160	10	23	18	6	10	1	25	420	3	1/8 recipe
Grilled Rib-Eye	32	510	250	59	2	28	10	13	1	170	1590	1	1/4 recipe, no butter
Roquefort Butter	33	90	80	1	0	9	6	3	0	25	125	0	per tablespoon
Grilled Porterhouse	33	600	430	39	2	48	20	25	2	130	1630	0	1/4 recipe, no harissa
Ancho Chile Harissa	34	60	50	1	3	5	1	3	1	0	75	1	per tablespoon
Grilled Flank Steak	34	300	150	35	0	17	6	7	2	90	350	0	1/4 recipe, no rub or sauce
Five-Spice Rub	34	5	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	480	0	per teaspoon
Sesame-Soy Sauce	34	50	40	0	2	4.5	0.5	2	2	0	130	0	per tablespoon
Southern Thai Rice Salad	36	390	100	13	65	11	8	1	1	15	860	6	
Thai Beef Salad	37	460	70	23	69	8	3	3	1	40	940	4	
Shrimp & Pomelo Salad	38	480	140	22	61	16	3	7	4	115	400	3	
Herb Salad	44	20	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	1	per cup
Creamy Herb Dressing	45	110	100	1	1	11	2	3	6	10	170	0	about 3 tablespoons
Herb Butter	45	35	35	0	0	4	2.5	1	0.5	10	50	0	per teaspoon
Paella	50	590	160	27	86	18	3	11	2	55	780	11	
Ginger-Mascarpone Icebox Cake	53	500	310	6	43	34	19	12	2	90	280	1	
Coffee & Cream Icebox Cake	53	380	240	4	33	26	14	9	2	75	300	1	
Lemon-Caramel Icebox Cake	54	460	290	5	41	32	18	10	2	230	125	1	w/o blueberries
Curry-Mint Rubbed Jumbo Shrimp	65	120	15	25	2	1.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	225	410	1	
Caribbean Grilled Pork Tenderloin	65	200	50	32	3	6	2	2	1	90	360	1	1/8 recipe
Spice Rubbed Steak or Lamb	66	240	80	34	4	8	4	4	1	100	460	1	1/4 recipe
Sesame-Ginger Rubbed Chicken	66	310	140	37	5	15	2	7	5	95	520	2	
Fresh Fruit Tart	70	550	330	8	48	37	18	14	3	210	100	2	1/8 tart w/o fruit
Pesto-Crusted Salmon	82	500	300	37	13	33	5	19	7	95	770	2	

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at The Food Consulting Company of San Diego, California. When a recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used in

the calculations. Optional ingredients and those listed without a specific quantity are not included. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used.



Just pat on the topping and bake. The bright herbal flavors of the pesto cut the richness of the fish.

Dress up Salmon with an Easy Pesto-Breadcrumb Coating

This salmon dish looks and tastes like you spent a lot of time on it, but it's really a snap to make. It's the perfect dish for an impromptu dinner with friends because you can easily pull it together after a long day at work.

For the freshest salmon, buy one large fillet and cut it into individual pieces yourself. The only other prep the fish needs is removing the pin bones, which you can easily find by running your finger along the top of the fillet. Using clean tweezers, small

pliers, or your thumbnail and finger, remove the bones one at a time by pulling them straight up.

Make the pesto and the breadcrumbs right in your food processor. If you have fresh breadcrumbs on hand, use those; otherwise, it takes about ten seconds to throw a few pieces of bread into the processor and pulse. Leave some of the crumbs behind in the machine (they give the pesto body) and save some to sprinkle on the fish for a crunchy coating.

An orange-butter sauce takes this dish to another level of elegance. Although the salmon and pesto are great on their own, a quick orange-accented butter sauce makes the dish feel even more special. To make the sauce, heat one cup of (preferably fresh) orange juice over medium-high heat until it's reduced by half. Add about two tablespoons of dry white wine—you can drink the rest of the bottle with dinner—simmer for a few seconds, and whisk in about four table-

spoons of cold butter, a tablespoon at a time. Season the sauce with salt and white pepper and ladle it around the finished fish. I like to serve this salmon with sautéed spinach.

Pesto-Crusted Salmon

You can play with the flavor of the pesto by replacing half of the basil with parsley or cilantro. *Serves four.*

- 3 slices white bread**
- 1 Tbs. pine nuts**
- 1 small clove garlic, finely chopped**
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 4 cups lightly packed fresh basil leaves**
- ⅓ cup olive oil; more for the pan**
- 4 boneless salmon fillets (about 6 oz. each)**

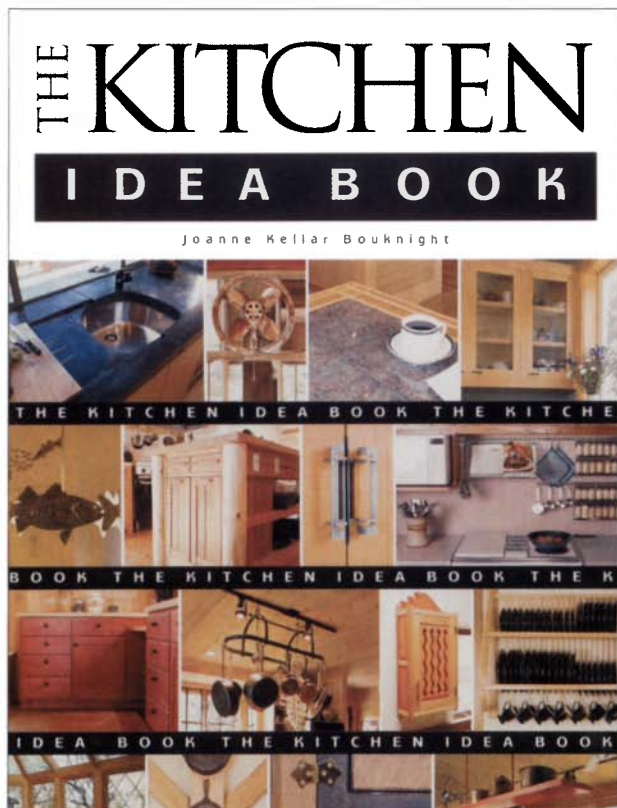
Pulse the bread in a food processor to make bread-crumbs. Remove about ½ cup of the crumbs and reserve them. Add the pine nuts, garlic, 1 tsp. salt, and ¼ tsp. pepper to the crumbs in the food processor and pulse. Add the basil and process again. With the motor running, add the olive oil in a slow stream, stopping occasionally to scrape down the sides of the bowl, until the pesto is spreadable.

Heat the oven to 400°F.

Brush a small baking sheet with oil, put the fillets on it, and season them with salt and pepper. Spread a ¼-inch layer of the pesto evenly over the top of each fillet. Sprinkle the reserved breadcrumbs over the pesto. Bake until the salmon is cooked—it should just start to turn opaque, with a trace of bright orange in the middle—and the topping is lightly browned, 10 to 15 min., depending on the thickness of the fish.

Rick Moonen is the executive chef and a partner of Oceana in New York City. ♦

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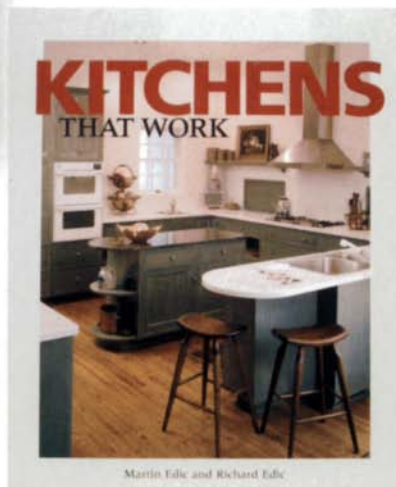
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Crafting Curds and Whey

Most of us probably think of cottage cheese as a prosaic supermarket staple, but at the Cowgirl Creamery in Point Reyes Station, California, cheesemaker

and co-owner Sue Conley raises it to a fine art, transforming milk into sweet, creamy curds.

The milk, which is from the Straus Family Dairy, a small, family-run farm nearby, is delicious, “like a single-vineyard wine,” says Conley, because it comes from the same small herd of cows that grazes the same land throughout the year. “People who don’t like cottage cheese change their minds when they taste ours,” Conley smiles.

It’s cooking that sets cottage cheese apart from other fresh cheeses; cottage cheese curds need



Hands-on and small-scale, the Cowgirl Creamery turns out prize-winning cheese.



both gentle cooking and gentle stirring (“kind of like making soft scrambled eggs,” says Conley). The stirring is crucial so that the curds don’t get big, hard, and clumpy. Large-scale dairies use huge rotary blades, which don’t give the tender, delicate result that comes from cutting and stirring curds by hand—as it’s done at the Cowgirl Creamery.



Skim milk is pasteurized, a high-acid culture (similar to buttermilk’s) is added, and curd-forming begins. Curds take 12 to 15 hours to coagulate; Conley then cuts them with a wire curd slicer. While large-scale dairies make up to 150,000 pounds of cottage cheese a day, Conley works in much smaller batches—a big day at the Cowgirl Creamery is 150 pounds of cottage cheese.



Slow, gentle cooking gives this cottage cheese its complex flavor. During cooking and stirring, the whey separates from the curds, starting out milky white and turning yellow as the cooking progresses. After cooking, the whey is poured off and the curds are washed twice to further firm them and to rinse away any bitter whey flavor.



Conley dresses the curds with “clabbered” cream, a mixture of milk and cream that has been cooked and cultured to bring out the sweetness and tang that’s natural to top-quality milk and cultures. Stabilizers, which can make cottage cheese gummy, are never used. Now the clabbered cottage cheese is ready to be hand-packed and savored.